THE EMERGENCE OF YEATS

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THE EMERGENCE OF YEATS

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INTRODUCTION

The object of this thesis is to present a detailed examination and analysis of the emergence and gradual development of the thought and personality of William Butler Yeats. I propose to consider the work of his early and middle periods in detail, not confining my study to the poetry alone---though it is inevitable that this shall play the major role in any analysis of Yeats---but placing considerable emphasis on the dramatic and prose works as well, for while only something under half of his lyric poetry belongs to this period, the bulk of his prose writings either belongs to or concerns these years, which also saw the production of his most significant plays.

My reason for concluding my survey where I do are twofold: First, by far the greatest number of critics have concerned themselves with Yeats' later, better poetry; secondly, by this time (1914-1917) the poet was essentially complete. He was to bring his style and thought to a further perfection; to refine, polish, and enlarge on it, but the basic thought, the basic material,---even the basic perfection---is already visible in RESPONSIBILITIES. My main reason for carrying the thesis beyond the publication of this volume is to include the culmination of Yeats' dramatic theory in AT THE HAWK'S WELL. By so doing I am also enabled to include two events which had a profound effect on the poet; the Easter Rebellion and the growing desire, accentuated by the passing of his fiftieth birthday, to beget descendants.

I have confined myself to that part of Yeats' career which I feel best fitted to understand and write on, and, for the most part, to the man himself, rather than going into any great detail about the countless influences which surrounded and may or may not have impinged on him. Little attempt is made either to trace the ultimate source of his thought or to follow its endless

modifications and complications in the more obscure mystical poetry, both being tasks which have been undertaken by those more widely read and with greater access to relevant material.

In general outline I have little to present that is original; this ground has already been covered, with varying success, by the steadily growing number of critics and commentators on Yeats---notably Mr. David Daiches in his book POETRY AND THE MODERN WORLD, and Dr. Norman Jeffares in his W. B. YEATS: MAN AND POET. With the exception of Dr. Jeffares, however, these men have tended to skim over the poet's earlier work with more generalization than detail, their criticism, when it does descend to particulars, concerning itself almost exclusively with the lyric poetry. Granting this, it is still inevitable that I shall include much that may be found elsewhere. I shall do my best to avoid concentrating on points which have been treated adequately by others; where this is not possible I have attempted as far as possible to record their agreement when they have arrived at the same conclusion as myself, and to acknowledge my debt when their material elaborates, suggests, or supports my own. On the not infrequent occasions when I find my opinions conflicting with those of others I shall make clear my point of departure and reasons for disagreement. For all biographical material I have consulted directly the original sources wherever this was possible. I have made no attempt to record where others have already tapped there sources unless they have either directed me to them or added original material.

In conclusion, I believe that I have found sufficient that is original, both as regards fresh material and fresh viewpoint to justify the thesis.

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THE EMERGENCE OF YEATS

SECTION 1

BACKGROUND AND CHILDHOOD

CHAPTER 1

ENVIRONMENT

In view of the lasting influence that his family and environment had on the poet, a fairly detailed examination of Yeats' youth and the factors that shaped that youth is necessary. Of these influences, particularly striking in his earlier work but never entirely absent from his verse, none perhaps was greater than that of the Sligo district where he spent the happiest part of his childhood.

A. Sligo

The legend-filled county of Sligo surrounds a bay of the same name on the north-west coast of Ireland. The Yeats family had been known in the district since 1805, when the poet's great grandfather, an Anglican clergyman named John Yeats, had been appointed to the living of Drumcliffe, (1)

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1) Hone, Joseph, Life of W.B. Yeats, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1943, p. 3.

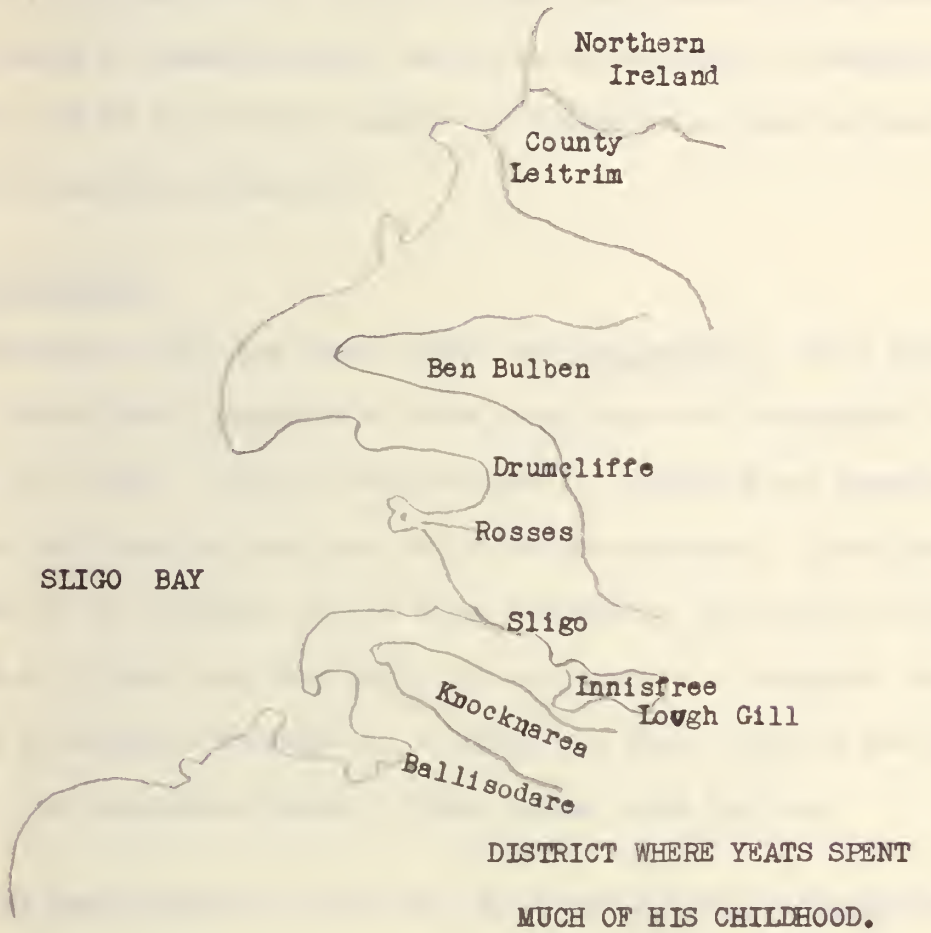
"a wide green valley, lying at the foot of Ben Bulben, whereon the great St. Columba himself...climbed one day to get near heaven with his prayers". (1) As rich with legend as the rest of the area, the bulky, flat-topped shoulder of Ben Bulben[2] is also the supposed location of Diarmuid's encounter with the wild boar,[3] while on its southern face, "hundreds of feet above the plain, is a small white square in the limestone....There is no more inaccessible place upon the earth, and ...few more encircled by terror. It is the door of faeryland".[4]

Not far from Drumcliffe, at the mouth of an inlet, sits Sligo, the principal town of the district. Across the river rises the peak of Knocknarea, at its base the point where Oisin fell to earth and took on the burden of his three hundred years.[5] A cairn on its summit is reputed to be the grave of Queen Maeve.[6] To the west of the town of Sligo on "a little sea-dividing, sandy plain, covered with short grass like a green table-cloth, and lying in the foam between the round cairn-headed Knocknarea and Ben Bulben"[7] lies the small village of Rosses, beyond which is a "promontory of sand and rocks and grass; a mournful haunted place".[8] Numerous caves and ancient ruined towers which the natives call 'raths'[9] are found nearby, and even the church, still standing, of which John Yeats was rector is built on the site of a monastery said to have been founded by Saint Columba.[10]

It was in this world, surrounded by mystery and tradition, that Yeats spent his happiest and most impressionable years. Dominated by the 'big houses' of the Anglo-Irish landlords[11] (County Sligo is only some ten miles below the border of Northern Ireland), but belonging in spirit and by ancient right to the native Irish fisherman and farmers with their folk histories that reach back to a time before the Flood; it was an environment that could hardly have failed to appeal

1) Yeats, W.B.., Early Poems and Stories, Macmillan, London, 1925, P.247
2) Henn, T. R., The Lonely Tower, Methuen, London, 1950, facing P.2.
3) Early Poems and Stories, P.216.
4) ibid., P.223.
5) Yeats, W.B., Poems, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1895, P.P.58-9.
6) Henn, P. 1.
7) Early Poems and Stories, P.247.
8) ~~ibid.~~
9) ibid., P.P.248-9 10) Hone, P.3. 11) Henn, P.8.

to the deepest emotions of an intensely imaginative and sensitive boy. The impression it made on Yeats was never erased.



DISTRICT WHERE YEATS SPENT MUCH OF HIS CHILDHOOD.

B. FAMILY.

Yeats had great pride in his family, a pride which continued to increase as he grew older and which, as he later became devoted to an aristocratic ideal, caused him to build legends about it. Its actual influence on him must not, however, be exaggerated. Present always, particularly in his earliest work, and forming a foundation that was never obliterated, it became as time went by only one of an infinite number of factors which went to make up his incredibly complex personality.

a. Antecedents:

To begin with, the Yeats family was Anglo-Irish. This fact is significant, for it gave them a position at once apart from and independent of the native Irish tradition. They had been settled in Ireland since sometime before 1712 (1) and had had time to take root and to become accepted. Thus Yeats was always welcome in the cottages of the Sligo villagers, the people willingly talking to him of things that they would not speak of to a stranger. During his London schooldays; throughout, in fact, his whole life, he was always considered, and considered himself, Irish rather than English.

Yet their English roots, and, more particularly, their Protestant faith, made the Yeats family essentially strangers in a potentially hostile land. The poet could never be truly Irish; he was always standing to one side, surrounded by but independent of the native tradition. A hybrid, he upheld the rights of the Irish against the English oppressors, but at the same time championed the aristocratic, intellectual minority of Protestant Anglo-Irish against the, to his eyes, inferior, priest - ridden native population.

1) Jeffares, A.N., W.B. Yeats, Man and Poet, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1952, P.1.

With the Irish, for them, he could never be---nor ever really desired to be---of them.

This estrangement was actually something of an advantage. Lacking the religious discipline, as well as the inbred coarseness and inertia of a people subjected to centuries of domination and poverty; belonging to a superior faction whom he doubtless felt were the legitimate heirs of Irish tradition, he could tamper with, even tread upon, things that to the ordinary Irishman were sacred. His was not an Irish conscience, nor was it an English one. Less mystic than the one, less materialistically ~~indeen~~ minded than the other, his was the quintessence of the Anglo-Irish personality.

b. Father

Of his immediate family, the person who had perhaps the greatest single influence on the poet in his youth was his father, the painter John Butler Yeats. Until his death in 1921 at the age of 82,[1] he followed, and did his best to guide, his son's career, ever ready with admiration, advice and encouragement.

An artist who, until the Land War brought them to an abrupt halt in 1880, lived chiefly on the rents from a small inherited estate,[2] his life, says Dr. Jeffares, "was based on the premise that a gentleman was not interested in getting on; life was full of more important and more interesting things than that".[3] It is added, justifiably, of his son that "in disregarding the normal worldly ambitions he (William) was under his father's influence".[4]

There were many other ways in which this temperamental artist influenced his son. He had fixed, if unorthodox, ideas on education and W. B. Y. often wished that he had taken him from school and taught him himself. "He would have taught me nothing but Greek and Latin, and I would now be a properly

1) Jeffares, P. 182.
2) Hone, P. 9.
3) Jeffares, P. 15.
4) ibid.

educated man...",[1] Yeats writes from a distance of thirty-five years. As a boy, however, he, from all indications, had rather different feelings on the matter. Describing an early attempt his father made at teaching a son who was unable to keep his mind on anything that did not interest him,[2] Yeats reveals that "his father was an angry and impatient teacher and flung the reading book at my head..."[3]

The father's ideas on religion were another thing that could hardly have harmonized with his son's temperament. The elder Yeats was a cheerful agnostic; a man, Hone says, "singularly incurious about God and immortality"[4] who professed, and practiced, complete indifference to the supernatural. Even so, ironically, it was he who gave the boy his first desire to practice occultism when he read to him The Lay of the Last Minstrel.[5]

The differences in opinion which separated them in later life did not appear until the poet was in his twenties, however; and, writing less than six months before his death, Yeats was still able to say; "When I was in my 'teens I admired my father above all men".[6] When he first began to write poetry the older man was quick to see its merit----an accomplishment which, considering Yeats' verse at this time, must have taken an unusually discerning eye, even in a fond father---and excitedly encouraged the youth, reading to him often. "He read passages from the poets, and always from the play or poem at its most passionate moment", recalls the poet. "He never read me a passage because of its speculative interest, and indeed did not care at all for poetry where there was generalization or abstraction, however impassioned".[7] It was at this time that "My father's influence upon my thoughts was at its height". Even then, however, differences in taste were apparent. Young William's

1) Yeats, W.B. Autobiographies, Macmillan, London, 1926, P.72.
2) ibid., P.28.
3) ibid., P.29.
4) Hone P.7.
5) Autobiographies, P.P.56-7.
6) Yeats, W.B. On the Boiler, Cuala Press, Dublin 1938, P.14.
7) Autobiographies, P.79.
8) ibid.

favorite poets were Tennyson and Wordsworth, both of whom his father detested.[1]

Altogether it may be said that J. B. Yeats was a necessary check and discipline during his son's formative period. Though he did not always follow his father's usually sound advice, he least listened, as may be seen in a letter J.B.Y. wrote to his friend Edward Dowden in 1884: "I tell him prose and verse are alike in one thing---the best is that to which went the hardest thoughts. This is also the secret of originality, also the secret of sincerity---so far I have his confidence---that he is a poet I have long believed---where he may rank is another matter".[2]

After Yeats left school his father's influence began to decline. The two were too similar in their argumentive temperaments and too different in their ideas to remain in harmony once the son's intellect began to explore its own path. Disagreements became frequent and occasionally of some violence. "Once, reports the poet, "he threw me against a picture with such violence that I broke the glass with the back of my head".[3] These outbreaks were infrequent, however, and after Yeats went to live in his own rooms relations with the older man were seldom strained. A man who "exalted dramatic poetry above all other kinds",[4] he never ceased to impress his favorite dictum on his son; one which, perhaps, bore more fruit than any other. "Poets," he insisted, "will ultimately find their salvation in writing plays for the public theatre".[5]

In spite of any differences they may have had, one cannot look at the illustrations J. B. Yeats made for his son's early work and then read this work, be it either prose or verse, without seeing how alike the pair were. The paintings, hardly great art, have the same twilight unreality, the same quiet, misty beauty that is found in the poetry.[6] The Father's own self-portrait,

1) Hone, P. 35.
2) Jeffares, P. 23.
3) On the Boiler, P. 15.
4) Autobiographies, P. 82.
5) Hone, P. 37.
(6) See illustrations for The Celtic Twilight, Lawrence & Bullen, London, 1893.

which Yeats includes in his autobiographies,[2] shows us a solemn elf of a man, in whose face is knowledge, enquiry and understanding. It is thus that he also appears to the student of Yeats' life. His encouragement and advice, his wise and gentle guidance, gave to the young poet the sound foundation that he needed and without which he might never have grown into a great poet.

C. Pollexfens and Middletons.

J. B. Yeats once said, "We have ideas and no passions, but by marriage with a Pollexfen we have given a tongue to the sea cliffs".[3] Later on in life his son reported that this was "The only eulogy which turns my head".[4]

Mrs. Yeats, a Pollexfen, was a frail, reserved woman who lived much in her mind, and "whose desire for any life of her own had disappeared in her care for us".[5] A drawing made by her husband shortly after their marriage[6] shows a girl whose character is withdrawn, yet firm; who is strikingly beautiful in a dreamlike way and who has large introspective eyes. She would spend hours telling her children ghost stories and tales about the people of Rosse's point,[7] and though few of the stories that he remembered later were hers, it was doubtless these long monologues that gave Yeats his first glimpse into the fascinating world of Irish folklore. The only other thing that the poet seems able to remember about her is that his father "was always praising her to my sisters and to me, because she pretended to nothing she did not feel",[8] a trait which was not to emerge in his own work until relatively late in life.

1)See illustrations for The Celtic Twilight, Lawrence and Bullen, London, 1893.
2)Autobiographies, facing P. 142.
3)ibid., P. 27.
4)ibid.
5)ibid., P. 38.
6)ibid.
7)ibid., P.P. 38, 75.
8)ibid., P. 75.

On the whole however, her influence was not great. It was rather her remarkable family which made the most lasting impression on the poet. The silent, majestic figure of her father; a half-legendary giant of a man who had once dived into the bay of Biscay to retrieve an old hat,[1] who had somehow received the freedom of a Spanish city,[2] and who had on his hand a great scar made by a whaling hook,[3] seemed to the boy a figure such as might have lived in the heroic age of old Ireland. "Even today", he writes in 1914, "When I read King Lear his image is always before me and I often wonder if the delight in passionate men in my plays and in my poetry is more than his memory".[4]

On the other side of his mother's family were the Middleton's, one of whom, the poet's great-grandfather, had been a highly successful smuggler who had obtained for his wife the daughter of a Jersey curate by abducting her from under her father's nose during church service.[5] He later died from cholera caught from a beggar that he was nursing during an epidemic.[6] Though they"lived close to the soil",[7] the Middletons were less practical and more acutely conscious of the supernatural than the Pollexfens. They took a real and deep interest in the country people; particularly their legends and superstitions, In his autobiography Yeats says that, "It was through the Middletons perhaps that I got my interest in country stories, and certainly the first faery stories that I heard were in the cottages about their houses".[8]

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Yeats' family, as his environment, was sufficiently unusual to provide him with the feeling that he did not belong to any of the conventional patterns.

1) Autobiographies P. 44,
2) ibid.
3) ibid
4) ibid P. 10.
5) Hone, P. 15.
6) Autobiographies, P. 8.
7) Hone, P. 22.
8) Autobiographies, P. 19.

The differences between himself and the generality of mankind appeared to his romantic mind, however, to be all to his advantage. Neither Irish nor English, he combined the best traits of both nations. His father was an artist, with better things to do than to drudge for money, so that the poverty of his family was a matter of choice rather than necessity. Essentially, an alien being, he was a superior alien; though apart from any set tradition or social level, he was able to feel himself at the same time above either. It was a significant beginning for a poet.

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CHAPTER 11

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY YOUTH

William Butler Yeats was born, on June 13, 1865, in Dublin; (1) but the family moved to London two years later where they lived, with frequent excursions to Sligo until 1880. (2).

The best record of the poet's earliest years is found in the fragmentary memories recorded in his autobiography in the section titled Reveries Over Childhood and Youth.(3) How much of what we find in this volume, written in 1914 when Yeats was nearly fifty, is a true picture of his early life and how much merely a careful selection of incidents calculated to show himself as he wished to be seen, as the budding poet, is, perhaps, open to dispute. There can be little doubt, however, that the book is an accurate and impartial, if somewhat patchy, account of this period. Yeats is by no means so inconsistent a personality as many commentators would like to make him out. Actually, it is hard to see anything particularly incongrous in the boy's attitudes foreshadowing those of the man. Again, one of his most striking faculties was his capacity for self-knowledge. He was never quite capable of deceiving himself. It might be noted in conclusion that the corroborating evidence of, in particular, Yeats' father, and to a lesser extent his childhood friends, at no point conflicts with the picture that we get from the poet's own words.

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1) Jeffares, P. 8.
2) ibid., P. 9.
3) Autobiographies, P.P. 1-132.

Young William was, from all accounts, an extremely self conscious and sensitive child. When the boy is seven, his father writes, in a letter which also reveals a good deal about that remarkable man;

> I believe him to be intensely affectionate, but from shyness, sensitiveness and nervousness, difficult to win and yet he is worth winning....Willy is sensitive intellectual and emotional, very easily rebuffed and continually afraid of being rebuffed so that with him one has to use sensitiveness...(1)

From the first, this sensitivity seems to have made the boy abnormally aware of the world beyond the senses. There can be no doubt that he was unusually prone to visions and premonitions, though he overrates this power; "I have been told, though I do not remember it myself, that I saw...a supernatural bird in the corner of my room," (2) he recalls. Another night he remembers dreaming that his grandfather's steamer was wrecked at the very hour that the event actually took place.(3)

Religion and the soul were from the first very real to the young poet. He remembers how the voice of his conscience first came to him; "once when I complained that a prayer had not been heard, it said, 'You have been helped'....From that day to this it has come to me at moments of crisis".(4) Still, even so early as this---these first recollections all belong to the time when he was six to eight years of age---he had little fondness for the external forms and rituals of orthodox religion. "I was often devout", he writes, "My eyes filling with tears at the thought of God and of my own sins, but I hated church." (5) He goes on to say how "My father's unbelief had set me thinking about the evidences of religion and I weighed the

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1) Jeffares, P.P. 9-10.
2) Autobiographies, P. 14.
3) ibid.
4) ibid., P.P. 13-14.
5) Ibid., P. 28.

matter perpetually with great anxiety, for I did not think I could live without religion. All my religious emotions were, I think, connected with clouds and cloudy glimpses of luminous sky". (1) The last phrase is significant when considered in connection with his early poetry, of which it is a strikingly accurate definition.

At about the same time, he made his first acquaintance with poetry. A stable boy, his friend, had a book of rhymes, "and the days when we read them together in the hay-loft gave me the pleasure of rhyme for the first time".(2) Shortly after, when he was nine, he brought from Sligo a model boat he called 'The Rose', (3) and, upon hearing 'The Lay of The Last Minstrel', conceived the desire "to turn magician".(4)---another childish dream he never outgrew.

Sent to a London day school, "an obscene, bullying place", (5) his dreamy nature and physical delicacy earned for him the usual torments to which a sensitive boy is subjected in such places; a torture intensified by his being Irish. Here for the first time he saw that he was of Ireland, with little in common with the English. Yet, he probably deserved a good number of the drubbings that he got, for he was already fully aware of his superiority to those who surrounded him, and it is unlikely that he took any pains to hide his contempt for them. He calls to mind a picture of himself perched loftily in a tree by the edge of the playing field, from where he looks down on the insect like beings scampering about below and reminds himself "that I am an artist's son and must take some work as the whole end of life and not think as the others do of

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1) Autobiographies, P. 31.
2) ibid., P. 17.
3) Hone, P. 27.
4) Autobiographies, P.P. 56-57.
5) ibid., P. 49.
6) ibid., P.P. 40-41.

becoming well off and living pleasantly".[1]

As for his studies, they were sheer misery, probably as much for those who had to try to teach him as for the future poet. "Because I had found it hard to attend to anything less interesting than my own thoughts," he recalls, I was difficult to teach".[2] He became noted for his eccentric spelling,[3] a distinction in which he seems to have taken a lifelong pride. Literature, which as then taught repelled him, was his worst subject.[4] His father, however, read Chaucer to him, and he himself read fairy tales, remembering vaguely that "I liked Hans Andersen better than Grimm because he was less homely, but even he never gave me the knights and dragons and beautiful ladies that I longed for..."[5]--and which, in time, in his own way, he created for himself. His happiest days were those spent at Sligo.[6]

In 1880, in financial difficulties, the family returned to Ireland, settling at Howth, only a few miles from Dublin but again a district full of ancient folklore and tradition.[7] By the time that he was seventeen, Yeats had lost interest in the sciences, which had for a time held his attention , and had begun to "play at being a sage, a magician or a poet".[8] "I had begun," he notes significantly, "to write poetry in imitation of Shelley and of Edmund Spenser, play after play....I invented fantastic and incoherent plots. My lines but seldom scanned."[9]

A brief infatuation with the theories of Darwin, Huxley, and Haeckel and other atheistic evolutionists[10] had given way to a state wherein, "I began occasionally telling people that one should believe whatever had been believed in all countries and periods, rejecting any part of such beliefs with great caution and only after

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1) Autobiographies, p. 51.
2) ibid., p. 28.
3) Hone, p. 34.
4) Autobiographies, p. 70.
5) ibid., pp57-58.
6) ibid., p. 63.
7) Jeffares, p. 18.
8) Autobiographies, p. 78.
9) ibid., pp. 81-82.
10) ibid., p. 73.

much evidence,[1] another habit he retained for the rest of his life. At School "He now stood ostentatiously aloof from the generality of the boys. He wrapped himself up in a dream of superiority".[2] Of his school essays, which his handwriting and spelling kept off the prize list, a former classmate says; "They used to impress me as full of imagery and fancy, such as I now know forecast the poet's powers of imagination and creative thought".[3]

He still spent his holidays at Sligo, staying with his bachelor uncle George Pollexfen,[4] something of a recluse. A youth full of dreamy romanticism, he took long walks in the country, and recalls how "I planned to live someday in a cottage on a little island called Innisfree".[5] He went about collecting stories of the supernatural from the villagers--- "The Ballad of Moll Magee" and the story "Village Ghosts" both belong to this time---[6] and became a fascinated attendant of his uncle's housekeeper, Mary Battle, who possessed second sight, and whose mind "was rammed with every sort of old history and strange belief. Much of my Celtic Twilight is but her daily speech."[7] The idea for "The Shadowy Waters" was already in his mind and one morning he persuaded a reluctant cousin to take him out onto the bay while it was still dark so that he could see what seabirds were stirring before dawn.[8]

Late in 1883, having left school, he followed his father's wishes and went to Dublin's Metropolitan School of Art,[9] the main result of which was his meeting the poet-mystic A. E. (George Russell),[10] who became his lifelong

1) Autobiographies, P. 96.
2) Hone, P. 42.
3) ibid.
4) Autobiographies, P.82.
5) ibid., P. 88.
6) Hone, P. 38.
7) Autobiographies, P. 87.
8) ibid., P. 90.
9) Hone, P.P. 43-4.
10) Autobiographies, P. 98.

friend. By this time, he writes, "Science I had grown to hate with a monkish hate...In my heart I thought only beautiful things should be painted, and that only ancient things and the stuff of dreams were beautiful...I did not care for mere reality and believed that creation should be deliberate".[1] He continued during this year and the next to write verse of increasingly fine quality, and finally, in the Dublin University Review for March 1885, he had published his first lyric, 'Voices' (now titled 'The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes').[2] He was not quite twenty.

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In this summary, I have attempted to touch on no more than those parts of the poet's youth which I consider significant in view of his later life and work. From these facts we can see that there is much that had its beginnings in that youth which bore striking fruit in the grown man. Yeats' life is not a kaleidoscope of vividly different personalities superimposed one on the other, but the coming to the surface, at different periods, of definite traits that are the orderly and proper manifestations of a personality capable of taking many outward forms, all of which were from the first inherent in it. In the next chapter we shall examine the first of these forms, or, as the poet was fond of calling them 'masks'; that of the Last of the Romantics.

~~A. T. CAIRNS~~

1) Autobiographies, P.P.

2) Wade, Allan, A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1952, P. 21.

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SECTION 11

THE CELTIC TWILIGHT

CHAPTER 1

CROSSWAYS

A. The Emergence of a Poet.

In the first Collected Edition of his poetry[1] Yeats wrote that he had divided those of his earliest verses which he had decided to retain into two sections. Those written before 1889 were to be included "in a section named Crossways, because in them he (the author) tried many pathways".[2]

The verses found here, which were first published with the long narrative poem 'The Wanderings of Usheen' in January 1889[3] bear out this statement. A careful selection of the best[4] that Yeats had written before his twenty-third year, these poems show the various byways into which the young poet wandered

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1) Yeats, W. B. Poems, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1895. This volume contains the earliest versions of the poetry discussed in this chapter that I have been able to obtain. All conclusions that I make are based on the poems as they appear in this book.
2) Poems, Introduction P.2.
3) Wade, Allan, A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats, Rupert Hart-Davis London, 1951, P.19.
4) Note list of poems in Wade's' Bibliography for The Wanderings of Usheen.

before deciding definitely on Ireland as the setting for his verse. "I had as many ideas as I have now", he says, writing of this period in his autobiographies, "only I did not know how to choose from among them those that belonged to my life".[1]

The volume is dedicated to Yeats' close friend and fellow poet, the young mystic A. E. (George Russell),[2] and is introduced by a quotation from Blake, whose visionary temperament fascinated him.[3] The quotation; 'The stars are threshed, and the souls are threshed from their husks',[4] has, doubtless, a private symbolic significance, but what exactly that significance may be, Yeats, who was fond at this time of appending copious explanatory notes to his poems,[5] never troubled to say. The overall implication is that of an escape from the things of the body, of a poetry which is the quintessence of the stars themselves. Though somewhat extravagant for a young poet's first efforts, this much is clear enough, and, in its way, a not innaccurate description of the poetry.

The section begins with the poem 'The Song of the Last Arcadian'[6] (A title changed by 1895 to 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd'),[7] an excellent example of Yeats' early manner at its worst. A too-conscious artistry is everywhere evident in the piece, with its archaisms (such as 'sooth' and 'Ruth'); its romantic affectations ('rood' for 'cross' and 'optic glass' for 'telescope'); its trite, outworn phrases (such as 'antique joy' and 'woods of Arcady'); and its sententious moralizing ("...there is no truth, "Saving in thine own heart").

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1) Yeats, W.B. Autobiographies, Macmillan and Co.Ltd., London, 1926, P.102.
2) Poems, P. 237.
3) He was at this time engaged, with Edwin Ellis on an elaborate edition of Blake's works. (Autobiographies, P. 199.)
4) Poems, P. 238.
5) See notes to Poems, 1895.
6) Wade, Bibliography, P. 19.
7) Poems, P. 239

The only real value the poem has lies in the light that it throws on Yeats ideas at this time. There is the recurring theme that the world has become too real, and, consequently, sick; that of all things, "Words alone are certain good".[1] A hatred for "grey truth" is revealed, along with a distrust of science; "Seek, then /"No learning from the starry men".[2] The poet speaks fondly of "Old earth's dreamy youth",[3] of a past that, through the transforming magic of legend, has become more---or, perhaps, less--than real, and exhorts his readers#;"... dream thou! /For fair are poppies on the brow: /Dream, dream, for this is also sooth"![4] It is these thoughts, striking through the crudity and affectation to reveal the true state of Yeats' mind at this time, which give the poem its real value. No doubt this made him retain the piece, virtually unaltered, to the last, though he later discarded and rewrote many verses that had more merit as poetry. A companion piece, 'The Sad Shepherd',[5] though it shows a surer hand, contains, apart from a heavy air of adolescent melancholy, little self-revelation.

Following the shepherd songs come three poems set in the India of the Golden Age.[6] The first, 'Anashuya and Vijaya',[7] a fragment from an unfinished play, shows some acquaintance with the mystic lore of India (he is, for example, familiar with Kama, the Indian god of lust), and traces of a cloudy symbolism in which the flamingo is prominent. In a note which first appears appended to the 1925 edition of his works, Yeats says: "the little Indian

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1) Poems, P. 239.
2) ibid, P. 240.
3) ibid., P. 241.
4) ibid.
5) ibid., P. 242.
6) ibid., P. 245.
7) ibid.

dramatic scene was meant to be the first of a play about a man loved by two women, who had the one soul between them, the one woman waking when the other slept, and knowing but daylight as the other only night....I am now onee more in 'A Vision' busy with that thought, the antitheses of day and of night and of moon and of sun".[1] 'The Indian to His Love'[2] is again full of vague symbols, and marks the first appearance of the island, a symbol of peace and contentment that recurs frequently throughout Yeats' early verse. This piece is followed by 'The Indian Upon God',[3] in which we have the moorfowl, the lotus, the roe-buck, and the peacock all imagining themselves as made in God's image. There are two ways in which this rather unusual poem may be interpreted. At first reading we might be inclined to see in it nothing more than an expression of the Romantic commonplace that all things beautiful are a reflection of God. It has, however, a faint air of bitterness. We feel that the poet is mocking the vanity of man, who claims that he alone is created in God's image. Here we may detect that side of Yeats' nature which was to emerge clearly in the bitter satire of many of the poems of his old age.

The knowledge of, and affection for, the oriental found in these three pieces is a natural outgrowth of the poet's inclinations toward occultism at this time. It was during the years 1885-86, when these poems were written,[4] that he became fascinated by Eastern occultism after reading a book called Esoteric Buddhism, and helped found the Hermetic Society designed "to promote oriental religions and theosophy generally".[5]

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1) Yeats, W. B. Early Poems and Stories, Macmillan and Co.Ltd., London, 1925, Notes, P. 527.

2) Poems, P. 254.

3) Poems, P. 252.

4) Wade, Bibliography, P. 19.

5) Hone, P.P. 49-50.

Of these first five verses Yeats later wrote, "Many of the poems in Crossways, certainly those upon Indian subjects or upon shepherds and fauns, must have been written before I was twenty, for from the moment when I began 'The Wanderings of Oisin', which I did at that age, I believe, my subject matter became Irish".[1] Allowing for a year's error in the age estimate, this statement may be taken as substantially true. All of the other poems in the volume show the influence of Ireland; either directly, in their subject matter, or indirectly in their tone and spirit. Of these, --'The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes',[2] which, under the title 'Voices', had been his first published lyric, introduces the question-and-answer dialogue that was to form a basic part of Yeats' style throughout his career. The poem itself is one of those beautiful lyrics, full of a haunting melancholy, which he was to produce from time to time. 'The Stolen Child'[3] Dorothy Hoare has called" as exquisite a lyric as any he wrote".[4] With its air of quiet joy and quiet sadness, its mingling of fantasy and the everyday, the piece is a part of the spirit of Ireland. The kettle is singing on the hob, the mice are scampering across the dirt floor, and outside the door a fairy sings to the child within:

> Come away, O human child!
> To the waters and the wild
> With a faery, hand in hand,
> For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.[5]

Here, for the first time Yeats uses his native Sligo for a background. The fairies live on an island in a lake bordered by Slewth Wood, dance on the sands of Ross Point, and fish in pools above Glen-Car.

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1) Early Poems and Stories, Notes, P. 527.
2) Poems, P. 244.
3) ibid., P. 263.
4) Hoare, D., The Works of Morris and of Yeats in Relation to Early Saga Literature, Cambridge University Press, 1937, P. 73.
5) Poems, P. 262.

Irish inspiration can be seen again in 'The Meditation of the Old Fisherman',[1] an example of "localized events and folklore transformed into a wistful dreamland of the poet's own making",[2] in which we have a romantic youth's conception of old age, personified in an old fisherman who mourns that everything has changed for the worst since the days "When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart".[3] Here, as in 'The Madness of King Goll',[4] we have the repetition of the key line at the end of each verse, another trick of style the poet used to the end of his life.

A growing preoccupation with things Irish becomes evident toward the end of Crossways; and this can be traced to Yeats' increasing nationalism. In 1886 he published an article on Sir Samuel Ferguson, a recently deceased poet.[5] Though it was a rhetorical and overpraising piece in which he came out for Celtic Ireland and a "distinctive national literature, written in English but deriving from native sources",[6] it was as a consequence of this article he met the famous patriot John O'Leary, "the handsomest old man I had ever seen",[7] who in Hone's words, "became a chief stimulating impact upon his life and awakened in him the desire of intellectual leadership in Ireland".[8] What really attracted Yeats more than anything else was probably the impressive appearance and unconsciously poetic speech of the old man, who "would say things that would have sounded well in some heroic Elizabethan play".[9] He joined O'Leary's Young Ireland Society,[10] and began to think that "if we had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting criticism",[11] Protestant and Catholic Ireland

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1) Poems, P. 268.
2) Jeffares, P. 42.
3) Poems, P. 268.
4) ibid., P. 259.
5) Hone, P. 53.
6) ibid., P. 54.
7) Autobiographies, P. 116.
8) Hone, P. 54.
9) Autobiographies, P. 118.
10) ibid, P. 122.
11) ibid, P. 126.

might be brought together. In 1925 he goes so far as to say, "From these debates, from O'Leary's conversation, and from the Irish books he lent or gave me has come all I have set my hand to since".[1]

Yeats no doubt was drawn to the ballad form because it was closest to the people and to the old traditions, and it is in this form that the last three poems of Crossways are composed. 'The Ballad of Moll Magee,[2] as already noted,[3] belongs to the period when Yeats first began to gather folk material from the Sligo villagers, and, though doubtless much revised before publication, is still full of such dialect terms as 'childer' for 'children' and 'say' for 'sea'. 'The Ballad of Father O'Hart'[4] is a less than gentle reproof to those "who dig old customs up", and 'The Ballad of the Foxhunter'[5] a sentimentalized picture of the Anglo-Irish landlord. On the whole, the ballad was a form ill suited to Yeats' genius, and these three examples are perhaps the least impressive pieces in Crossways.

Of this early verse on Irish subjects, the poet wrote in 1901;

> {"I thought one day---I can remember the very day when I thought it--- 'if somebody could make a style which would not be an English style and yet would be musical and full of colour, many others would catch fire from him, and we would have a really great school of ballad poetry in Ireland!'...Then a little later on I thought, 'If they (the Irish poets) had something else to write about besides political opinions, if more of them would write about the beliefs of the people ...or about old legends...they would find it easier to get a style'. Then with a deliberateness that still surprises me,for in my heart of hearts I have never been quite certain that one should be more than an artist, that even patriotism is more than an impure desire in an artist, I set to work to find a style and things to write about that the ballad writers might be the better".}[6]

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1) Autobiographies, P. 125.
2) Poems, P. 273.
3) Thesis, Chap. 1, section 1, P. 15.
4) Poems, P. 274.
5) ibid, P. 276.
6) Yeats, W. B. Essays, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1924, P.4.

In Crossways Yeats has not yet quite found the style he sought. At times he almost achieves it, notably in the simpler lyrics such as 'The Falling of the Leaves', and 'The Stolen Child', but the poems, even as they stand six years after their first publication in 1889, give us only occasional glimpses of any originality. How much revision these pieces might have undergone in those six years it is difficult to say. Many of the titles have been altered; this much can be seen from a bibliography of the original volume; and many poems have been discarded altogether, including all of the long narrative poem 'Mosada' and most of the poetic drama 'The Island of Statues'.(1) However, by 1895 Yeats' concept of what a poem should be like and his basic ideas on the duties of an artist had not yet begun to change, and any modifications up to this point would be more likely to be in the lyric arrangement than in the thought of the pieces. Therefore, the picture of Yeats' given us by the poems in Crossways is doubtless accurate.

Perhaps the greatest overall impression that we get from these verses, overshadowing even the sense of a bewildered genius seeking its path, is one of a pensive, all-pervading sadness. There is little anywhere in Yeats' poetry that is light or comic; he was of a moody disposition and tended to take himself perhaps too seriously. This habit, partly pose, partly sincere, is particularly marked in his early years, and in the verses of Crossways, we find

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1) Wade, Bibliography, P.P. 20-21.

hovering ever in the background, the picture of a dark-haired, black-cloaked genius sunken in a melancholy contemplation of itself. Perhaps no poem conveys the sense of this feeling more than the lyric 'The Falling of the Leaves'.[1]

> Autumn is over the long leaves that love us,
> And over the mice in the barley sheaves;
> Yellow the leaves of the rowan above us,
> And yellow the wet wild-strawberry leaves.
>
> The hour of the waning of love has beset us,
> And weary and worn are our sad souls now;
> Let us part, ere the season of passion forget us,
> With a kiss and a tear on thy drooping brow.

B. Life and Thought, 1885-1889.

During this period his conviction that he was a mystic resulted in Yeats' joining many theosophical societies. Most of these societies, however, were to greater or lesser extent based on fraudulent practices, and the poet seems always to have approached them with a certain scepticism, leaving us this description of the leader of one of them, MacGregor Mathers; "Mathers had much learning but little scholarship, much imagination and imperfect taste... He was a necessary extravagance".[2] Again, though he became attached to the group that gathered about Madame Blavatsky, he seems, as had been the case with O'Leary, to have been attracted more by the old woman's extraordinary personality than anything else, describing her as "a sort of old Irish peasant woman with an air of humour and audacious power".[3]

Painfully self-conscious, he made every effort to overcome his shyness, speaking at meetings of the Young Ireland Society,[4] and then, finding that he was "only self-possessed with people I knew intimately, I would often go to a strange house where I knew I would spend a wretched hour for schooling sake".[5]

1) Poems, P. 256.
2) Autobiographies, P. 232.
3) ibid., P. 122
4) ibid, P. 116.
5) ibid., P. 147.

The Yeats family was living in Bedford Park at this time, and nearby there was a "clubhouse with a little theatre that began to stir my imagination ".[1] He persuaded a family friend who was an amateur playwright, John Todhunter, to write a pastoral play, which was performed on the clubhouse stage in 1896[2] with Florence Farr in the leading role. Both she and the male lead spoke verse beautifully, but "when they closed their mouths, and some other player opened his, breaking up the verse to make it conversational, jerking his body or his arms that he might seem no austere poetical image but very man, I listened in raging hatred".[3] Urged on by his father, Yeats had long thought on the possibilities of a revival of verse drama; in his teens he produced "play after play";[4] and this incident further increased his enthusiasm for the form. "I had discovered for the first time", he later noted, "that in the performance of all drama that depends for its effect upon beauty of language, poetical culture may be more important than professional experience".[5]

Meanwhile, he had taken to supporting himself by taking on various literary tasks, such as gathering Irish poems and fairy tales for collected editions and acting as a correspondent for Irish-American newspapers such as the Providence[6] Journal. He was firmly convinced by now that poetry was to be his life work, and it came to be almost a religion to him:

> "I was unlike others of my generation in one thing only. I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition. I had even created a dogma: "Because those imaginary people are created out of the deepest instinct of man, to be his measure and his norm, whatever I can imagine those mouths speaking may be the nearest I I can go to truth".[7]

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1) ibid., P. 147
2) Jeffares, P. 61.
3) Autobiographies, P. 149.
4) ibid., P. 82
5) ibid, P. 149.
6) Jeffares P.P. 39-41.
7) Autobiographies, P.P. 142-43

His membership in the Young Ireland Society and friendship with O'Leary began to turn his thoughts toward the idea of a literary renaissance throughout Ireland, which was at that time entering on a period of change and increased unrest. "I began to plot and scheme how one might seal with the right image the soft wax before it began to harden"[1], he recalls, and remembers saying to an Irish student "Her (Ireland's) poetry when it comes will be distinguished and lonely"[2]. Even before Ireland, however, came his own personal destiny, of which he was ever acutely conscious. "If I can be sincere and make my language natural," he would say to himself with that power of premonition that in him almost approached prophecy, "I shall, if good luck or bad luck make my life interesting, be a great poet"[3].

C. Yeats and 'The Wanderings of Usheen'.

In August of 1888 Yeats finished his long narrative poem, 'The Wanderings of Usheen'[4], which, he says, "is founded upon the Middle Irish dialogues of St. Patrick and Usheen and a certain Gaelic poem of the last century. The events it describes...are supposed to have taken place rather in the indefinite period, made up of many periods, described by the folk-tales, than in any particular century".

The poem takes the form of a dialogue in which Usheen tells his story to St. Patrick. One day, while out hunting with his fellow warriors of the Fianna, he was standing on the shore below Knocknarea when Niamh, a goddess of the Tuatha de Danaan, the Ageless Ones, came to offer herself as his wife. He mounted behind her and they rode off across the sea to the Land of the Young where he hunted and feasted for a hundred years before the sight of a broken spear on the beach saddened him with the memory of his warrior comrades.

1) Autobiographies, P.P. 125-26.
2) ibid., P. 125.
3) ibid., P. 127.
4) Jeffares, P. 41: Poems, P. 1.
5) Poems, Notes, P. 286.

Wise Niamh then carried him to the Island of Many Fears where he spent another century alternately vanquishing an indestructible monster and resting and feasting until, again reminded of his friends, he was brought to the Island of Forgetfullness, where he lay in uneasy slumber a third century among the giant man-birds. Finally, when a weary starling settled on to his hand he felt that he had to see his old companions again, and, warned that if he should but touch the earth he would become a mortal once more, returned to Ireland. All was changed. Churches were everywhere. The Fenians were all dead, the old gods forgotten, the people become a weak captive race. When he found two men at the foot of Knocknarea unable to lift a bag of sand between them he picked it up in exasperation and hurled it five yards with one hand. At once the spell was broken and he found himself a man three hundred years old.

St. Patrick tells him that his old friends are all in hell and urges him to do penance for his sins, but Usheen throws away his rosary, choosing to "dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast".[1]

Speaking of himself as he was at this time, Yeats says; "I, that my native scenery might find imaginary inhabitants, half-planned a new method and a new culture. My mind began drifting vaguely towards that doctrine of 'the mask' which has convinced me that every passionate man is, as it were, linked with another age, historical or imaginary, where alone he finds images that rouse his energy".[2] There can thus be little doubt that Yeats puts much of himself into Usheen, that this story of the legendary hero is the first fumbling attempt the poet made to display his as yet but dimly apprehended doctrine of the 'self and anti-self'. Yeats, like Usheen, is the young mortal, beloved of the gods, who is carried to the land of neverchanging beauty where

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1) Poems, P. 62

2) Autobiographies, P. 188

"the moon (symbol of the imagination) like a white rose shone
In the pale west, and the sun's rim (symbol of the pure intellect) sank,
And clouds arrayed their rank on rank
About his fading crimson ball". [1]

He goes first to dance and sing with the gods and heroes of old Ireland. Then, recalled to the business of life, which is struggle, he engages a foe he can defeat but never destroy till, weary, he seeks in vain peace and forgetfulness, only to be called back to mortality to curse and rant at the impotent futility of old age.

Here we are given an instance of Yeats' ability to foresee what the future held for him. In this piece of allegory, completed before his twenty-fourth birthday, we have a brief, strikingly accurate outline of his entire later career. True, he took as the basis of the poem a story that was known to Campion as early as 1571,[2] but there were a number of versions of the tale extant[3] and for his purposes Yeats chose parts from several of these variations, deliberately building up a structure and hero which expressed what he desired to express.

Among the various traits of Yeats personality that may be found in the poem, that which stands out most clearly is the conflict between orthodox Christianity and more exotic theories regarding the supernatural. This conflict was very real in Yeats, and very important to him. The Catholic Irish had managed to reconcile the old beliefs with the new by completely embracing the latter while neither quite accepting nor quite denying the former. Yeats, on the other hand, for all the intensity of his mysticism, lacked the certainty of a strong, established religious faith and spent his whole life vainly seeking a solid foundation for his beliefs. Here, in early youth, the conflict is

1) Poems P. 12.
2) Jeffares, P. 43.
3) ibid.

between the virile, belligerent pagan creed and the submissive weakness apparently taught by Christian humility.

> We sang the loves and angers without sleep.
> And all the exultant labours of the strong.
> But now the lying clerics murder song
> With barren words and flatteries of the weak.[1]

As a result of being frail physically and of a retiring nature, Yeats here takes the part of Usheen, symbol of that fierce, proud independence he cherished and envied. Patrick, deliberately, is a mere sketch, an unimpressive minor prophet set up as an altogether inadequate foil against the unrepentent pagan. In Yeats himself the basic conflict was never resolved; the whole problem is threshed out again in 'Supernatural Songs'[2] in 1935 with much the same result.

Another characteristic of the poet's nature that may be found in the poem is his love of physical strength and beauty, seen in the contempt Usheen professes for the creatures the Irish have become in his abscence. It is a theme that appears repeatedly in his poetry as in his life, where it is exemplified in his hopeless love for the queen-like Maud Gonne. Closely linked to this love of beauty is the almost pathological dread of and hatred for old age with all its ugliness and decay; a hatred seen in the words of Usheen as he looks at himself become "A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on his beard never dry".[3] This attitude, again, was to grow on Yeats as he himself became old.

As fits the retelling of an old Irish legend, the poem is Irish in subject-matter throughout. The setting, when Usheen is not in the spirit world, is Sligo. The Fenians ride past the Firbolgs' burial mounds near Ballisodare[4] and come to "the cairn-heaped grassy hill/"Where passionate Maeve is stony still";[5] Knocknarea, where, in the end, Usheen loses his charmed life.[6] The gods of old Ireland, too, are here; Aengus and Emain,

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1) Poems, P. 36
2) Yeats, W. B. Collected Poems, Macmillan and Co. Ltd. London, 1952 P. 327
3) Poems, P. 59
4) Poems P. 6, and Notes, P. 283
5) Poems, P. 6
6) Poems P. 58.

Aedh and Mannanan, with the heroes of the Fianna;

> Caolte and Conan and Finn were there,
> When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,
> With Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair...(1)

There is also to be found in the poem glimpses of the deep, half-seen, half-felt wisdom that marks the best of Yeats' early works, as well as an obscure symbolism that is, on the whole, deliberately vague. In a letter to Katherine Tynan written at this time, he says;

> "Since I left 'The Island' (2) I have been going about on shoreless seas. Nothing anywhere has any clear outline. Everything is cloud and foam. 'Oisin' and 'The Seeker' are the only readable results. For the second part of 'Oisin' I have said several things to which I only have the key. The romance is for my readers. They must not even know there is a symbol anywhere. They will not find out. If they did it would spoil the art, yet the whole poem is full of symbols---if it be full of anything but clouds". (3)

Some of the symbols that he refers to we have already considered.(4) Among the others that are found repeatedly in the poet's later work are: the bell branch, (5) said to have been used by the reciting bardic poet to cast a spell over his hearers; (6) the Seven Hazel Trees, (7) "the source of all the waters of the world, which are therefore sevenfold";(8) the creatures that are part bird, part man; (9) and the hornless deer pursued by a phantom white hound with one red ear, (10) figures from the original legend which seem to Yeats "plain images of the desire of the man 'which is for the woman, and 'the desire of the woman which is for the desire of the man', and of all desires that are as these". (11)

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1) Poems, P.P. 5-6
2) 'The Island of Statues' Yeats' first unsuccessful attempt at a long narrative poem.
3) Jeffares, P. 46.
4) Thesis, P. 14.
5) Poems, P. 46.
6) Poems, notes, P. 282.
7) ibid., P.30.
8) Poems, notes, P. 285.
(9) Poems, P. 44.
(10) ibid., P. 11-12
(11) Collected Poems, P. 526.

as clear". The Symbolism underlying the whole piece is, as Dr. Jeffares notes, "probably contained in the three imperceptible things man is always seeking",[1] which Yeats summarizes in one of his last poems, where he speaks of;

> ... Oisin led by the nose
> Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
> Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose. (2)

While a criticism such as that of Thomas Henn, when he says of the poem that, "There is sentimentality, occasional clumsiness of technique, and a pretentious private symbolism"[3] is substantially true, we must not go so far as Dorothy Hoare in declaring that "The poem is written almost entirely for the sake of the embroidery".[4] Yeats, it cannot be denied, is somewhat overwhelmed by a youthful enthusiasm for words; a fact that he was quite aware of, and that he acknowledges in another letter to Miss Tynan; "perhaps...only shadows have got themselves on the paper. And I am like the people who dream some wonderful thing and get up in the middle of the night and write it and find next day only scribbling on the paper". (5) Yet there is, as I have pointed out, much more to the poem that mere verbal embroidery. There is strength and meaning and beauty, as well as the same air of sadness found in the Crossways poems:

> But when I sang of human joy
> A sorrow wrapped each merry face. (6)

Here, however, we are much closer to the source of this melancholy. It stems from the aching knowledge that torments every lover of beauty, the certainty that it must all sink through decay and ugliness to dust:

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1) Jeffares, P. 47.
2) 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', Collected Poems, P. 391.
3) Henn, T. H., The Lonely Tower, Methuen and Co., London, 1952, P. 103.
4) Hoare, Dorothy, The Works of Morris and Yeats in Relation to Early Saga Literature Cambridge University Press, 1937, P. 114.
5) Jeffares, P. 42.
6) Poems, P. 16.
7) Jeffares, P. 42.
8) Poems P. 16.

The hare grows old as she plays in the sun
And gazes around her with eyes of brightness;
Before the swift things that she dreamed of were done,
She limps along in an aged whiteness;
.....
And 'My speed is a weariness', falters the mouse;
And the kingfisher turns to a ball of dust,
And the roof falls in of his tunnelled house. (3)

Yeats' own final word on the poem---and on himself at this time---may be found in still another letter to Miss Tynan.

"I fear I have been somewhat inarticulate! I had indeed something I had to say. Don't know that I have said it. All seems confused, incoherent, inarticulate. Yet this I know, I am no idle poetaster. My life has been in my poems,...I have seen others enjoying life while I stood alone with myself---commenting---commenting---a mere dead mirror on which things reflect themselves. I have buried my youth and raised over it a cairn---of clouds". (4)

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1) Poems, P. 24.

2) Jeffares, P. 46.

CHAPTER 11

INTO THE ROSE

A. First Fame

The Wanderings of Usheen and Other Poems was well received by the critics, both English and Irish, and at once established Yeats in the first rank of Irish writers. Edward Dowden, Oliver Elton and Oscar Wilde sent congratulations. (1) W. E. Henley added him to the group of promising young writers who worked under his guidance and published whatever Yeats chose to contribute to his paper, the Scots Observer, for which the poet wrote "my first good lyrics and tolerable essays".[2] At Henley's residence he met most of the literary figures of the day,[3] including Wilde, who impressed him as being, like himself, one who "felt the strain of an intensity that seemed to hold life at the point of drama". (4) He made the acquaintance of William Morris and for a short time took to attending Socialist club meetings, where he encountered every anarchist from Prince Kropotkin to Bernard Shaw.[5] These earnest, practical minded even prosaic visionaries could not, however, long hold one who "wanted the strongest passions,

1) Hone, P.P. 65-6.
2) Autobiographies, P. 159
3) Jeffares, P. 55.
4) Autobiographies, P. 162.
5) ibid., P.P. 172-73.

passions that had nothing to do with observation".[1] Their ideas on religion particularly annoyed Yeats, and this was the eventual reason for his breaking away from the group. "Gradually the attitude towards religion of almost everybody but Morris...got upon my nerves, for I broke out after some lecture or other with all the arrogance of raging youth. They attacked religion, I said, or some such words, and yet there must be a change of heart and only religion could make it". (2)

B. Maude Gonne

It was not long, however, before the young poet's restless emotions found an object to which to attach themselves. One day not long after his book of poetry was published a hansom drove up to the Yeats' house in Bedford Park. In it was the already famous Irish patriot beauty, Miss Maude Gonne.[3] "I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty", Yeats recalls in his unpublished autobiography. "It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past".[4] He fell in love at once, and that same afternoon annoyed his father by taking her side in the argument that inevitably sprang up between the pair, "though," Yeats says, "he might have understood that ...a man as young as I could not have differed from a woman so beautiful and so young". (5)

Maude Gonne was already, at the age of twenty-two, a half-legendary figure, who, with her great height and beauty, seemed to the Irish people almost a reincarnation of one of their legendary queens.[6] Having dedicated her life to the cause of Irish nationalism, she had been impressed by Yeats' poetry, and wanted to enlist his genius in the service of Ireland. (7)

L) Autobiographies, P. 173.
2) Autobiographies, P. 183
3) ibid., P. 151.
4) Jeffares, P. 59.
5) Autobiographies, P. 152.
6) Jeffares, P. 60.
7) ibid. P. 59.

She provided him with the spark that he was unconsciously seeking, giving to his work the necessary incentive and confirming him in his vague desire to write for and of Ireland. When his attachment to O'Leary and the Nationalists might quickly have given way to disgust at their constant internal bickering and ranting patriotic doggeral, as, in time, it did, his love for Maud kept him in their ranks for many years.

A shy youth, he saw in Maud the countless impossible qualities that a poet can manage to attribute to an attractive woman. "I was a Romantic, he wrote many years later, "my head full of the mysterious women of Rossetti and those hesitating faces in the art of Burns Jones...I gathered from Shelley and the romantic poets an idea of perfect love. Perhaps I should never marry in church, but I would love one woman all my life".[1] Perhaps the best description of the poet's state of mind at this time is given by Dr. Jeffares when he says; "In love with love, he had a desire for an exciting and unusual woman to love. Because he was different himself his love should add to his distinction. She was to have some of the qualities of those wild women, heroic and lawless....She must have beauty fit for a poet to sing". (2)

C. New Interests and Activities.

The first night Yeats and Maud dined together "she spoke to me of her wish for a play that she could act in Dublin".[3] He set to work at once on

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1) Jeffares, P.P. 57-8 (Yeats unpublished autobiography)

2) Jeffares, P. 59

3) Jeffares, P. 59.

The Countess Kathleen. Throughout 1890 he continued to work on this play, as well as on an edition of Blake in which he was collaborating with Edwin Ellis.[1] In December he published the first poem to give him worldwide fame, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'.[2] He recalls that he was very poor "and must, I think, have been delicate, for I remember often putting off hour after hour consulting some necessary book 'at the British Museum' because I shrank from lifting the heavy volumes of the catalogue".[3] To support himself he compiled selections of Irish fairy stories for various publishers, a task for which he was poorly paid, but which he had chosen for his own purposes.[4] "Forced to live away from Ireland most of the year, it was a means of keeping my mind upon what I knew must be the subject matter of my poetry".[5] He hated London as much as ever---"In London I saw nothing good"[6]---and lived for the most part in a romantic world he had made for himself, "always planning some great gesture, putting the whole world into one scale of the balance and my soul into the other and imagining that the whole world somehow kicked the beam". (7)

In 1891 he and the Welsh anthologist Ernest Rhys formed the Rhymer's Club, which met at the 'Cheshire Cheese'[8] every night and soon became a rendezvous for all the young poets in London. Among those who attended its meetings were Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Selwyn Image, Arthur Symons, and Oscar Wilde.[9] By the end of the century the lives of most of these men had ended in tragedy. One night, long before any of this became apparent, Yeats remembers saying to the assembled poets, "None of us

1) Autobiographies, P. 199.
2) Jeffares, P. 64.
3) Autobiographies, P. 184.
4) ibid., P. 185.
5) ibid.
6) Autobiographies, P. 191.
7) ibid.
8) Jeffares, P. 64.
9) Autobiographies, P. 204.

can say who will succeed, or even who has or has not talent. The only thing certain about us is that we are too many". (1)

New purposes to which his art might be put began to take shape in his mind, He began to think that the way to unify Ireland might be through the revival and propagation among all classes of Irish of the common heroic tradition found in the old legends and stories.

> "I delighted in every age where poet and artist confined themselves gladly to some inherited subject-matter known to the whole people, for I thought that in man and race alike there is something called 'Unity of Being'...I thought that all art should be a Centaur finding in the popular lore its back and its strong legs". (2)

D. The Countess Kathleen

In the late summer of 1891[3] Yeats finished his play The Countess Kathleen, which was published early in 1892.[4] Dedicated to Miss Gonne, it is a piece of obvious allegory which has the Countess, a wealthy Irishwoman moved by the sight of the peasants on her estate starving during a famine, giving all that she possesses for them, even in the end buying their souls, which they have sold to the devil for food, with her own.[5] That Kathleen represents Maud, who at this time was seriously ill due to overwork among the dispossessed peasants,[6] is clear. Just as Kathleen sells her soul for the peasants, whom Yeats represents as altogether unworthy of such a sacrifice, so he saw Maud as destroying

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1) Autobiographies, P. 211.
2) ibid., P. 235, 236.
3) Jeffares, P. 70.
4) ibid. P. 71
5) Poems, P.P. 63-156.
6) Jeffares, P. 71.

herself for the sake of an Ireland both unworthy and ungrateful.

> "When I wrote my Countess Kathleen, I thought, of course, chiefly of the actual picture that was forming before me, but there was a secondary meaning that came into my mind continously. 'It is the soul of one who loves Ireland', I thought, 'plunging into unrest, seeming to lose itself, to bargain itself away to the very wickedness of the world, and to surrender what is eternal for what is temporary'". (1)

Aleel, the unchristened poet who tries with his songs and stories from old legend, unsuccessfully, to make Kathleen forget her sorrow and self-imposed duty is, of course, Yeats himself. Just as Yeats believed in visions, so Aleel believes the invisible spirits who have warned him of Kathleen's danger.[2] Again, like Yeats, he determines to cover his despair "with a lonely tune".[3] Meanwhile, Maud is pleaded with, through the person of the old servant Oona, to "...make a soft cradle of old tales, and songs, and music: wherefore should you sadden/"For wrongs you cannot hinder?"[4] But all entreaties are in vain; though Kathleen wishes that she might "go down and dwell among the Shee",[5] her duty to her people is clear and she will not swerve from it.

The play frequently refers to the Irish legendary figures that filled Yeats' mind at the time---Fergus and Usheen, Finn and his Fenians, Naisi and Deirdre,---though, oddly, the setting is not recognizable as in Sligo. The poetry, while often insipid or overornate, at times comes to us with a strange, uneasy power surging through the verses, as when Kathlessn replies to the peasants, who are complaining that God has forsaken them:

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1) Yeats, W. B. Dramatic Personae, Macmillan, London, 1935, P. 35.

2) Poems, P. 76.

3) ibid, P. 77.

4) ibid., P. 95.

5) ibid., P. 102.

Be silent; He does not forsake the world,
But stands before it modelling in the clay
And moulding there His image. Age by age
The clay wars with His fingers and pleads hard
For its old, heavy, dull, and shapeless ease;
At times it crumbles and a nation falls,
Now moves awry and demon hordes are born. (1)

E. The Rose

The 'Various legends and Lyrics' originally included in the same volume with The Countess Kathleen were afterward put by themselves in a separate section "named The Rose, for in them he (the author) has found, he believes, the only pathway whereon he can hope to see with his own eyes the Eternal Rose of Beauty and of Peace".[2] This section is introduced by a quotation from St. Augustine; "Sero te amavi, Pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova! Sero te amavi".[3] 'Always shall I adore you, Beauty ever old and ever new!'---an appropriate sentiment with which to begin a series of poems dominated by the Rose, symbol always, in all the various forms in which it appeared to Yeats, of Beauty incarnate.

In the first poem, 'To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time',[4] he declares his intentions: to "Sing of old Eri and the ancient ways...And of thine own sadness", to seek.

"...under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way". (5)

Yet, he would not care to sink quite completely into the Rose; he would like to be left a space to breathe, "Lest I no more hear common things that crave".[6]

1) Poems, P. 129.
2) ibid, Introduction, P.V.
3) ibid., P. 196.
4) ibid., P. 197.
5) ibid.
6) ibid., P. 198.

The majority of the poems in The Rose belong to one of three groups; those based on old Irish legend, those set in contemporary Ireland, and the love poems inspired by Maud. The verses in the first division reflect Yeats' growing desire to recreate for the Irish of all classes the old legends, in this way reminding them of their common tradition. In the first of these, 'Fergus and the Druid',[1] Fergus, having transferred the burdens of kingship to Concobar, has sought out an old Druid priest to "learn the dreaming wisdom that is yours".[2] Here we find early traces of that deep, uncertain wisdom that lurks just below the surface of much of Yeats' early work, flickering through such lines as;

> A wild and foolish labourer is a King
> To do and do and do, and never dream. (3)

And

> But now I have grown nothing, being all. (4)

'The Death of Cuchoollin'[5] is, on the other hand, a straightforward reworking in verse of an episode in the life of the greatest of the heroes of Irish legend. It marks the first appearance of the figure who, of all the characters in Irish mythology, most appealed to Yeats, who retained him to the end, where he appears in the poem 'Cuchulain Comforted',[6] dated January 13, 1939; two weeks before the poet's death. Another significant fact about this particular piece is the author's inaccurate description of the episode. Cuchulain did not, as Yeats implies here, die fighting the waves when crafty Concubar cast a spell on him to divert his wrath after he had unintentionally killed his own son;[7] an error the poet later acknowledged in changing his title to 'Cuchulain's Fight With the Sea'.

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1) Poems, P. 199.
2) ibid.P200.
3) ibid., P. 201.
4) ibid., P. 201.
5) ibid., P. 202.
6) Collected Poems, P. 395
7) O'Grady, Standish (in 1000 years of Irish Prose, ed. Mercier & Greene, P. 72.

A number of the poems are concerned with the Ireland of Yeats' own day. Some of these, such as 'A Faery Song' and 'A Cradle Song', are beautiful scraps of song with no particular significance. Another, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'[1] sees joined the Island, symbol of quiet peace, and the beloved Sligo district. Describing it as "my first lyric with anything in its rythm of my own music",[2] he recalls in his autobiography how, at the time he wrote it,

> "I had still the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill, and when walking through Fleet Street very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball upon its jet and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem Innisfree". (3)

In the 'Dedication to a Book of Stories Selected From the Irish Novelists',[4] Yeats' increasingly militant nationalism is visible, though nearly smothered by the weight of gilded rhetoric that the poem carries. It is not until the last piece in the book, 'To Ireland In the Coming Times',[5] that he really asserts his right to be counted as one of those who have served Ireland. In lines through which marches the fresh beat of a strong, disciplined, confident rhythm that gives us a glimpse of the future he proclaims;

> Know that I would accounted be
> True brother of that company,
> Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
> Ballad and story, rann and song. (6)

A clear sharp note of defiant nationalism is sounded, a nationalism which shall be nourished and strengthened by literature, for,

> I cast my heart into my rhymes,
> That you, in the dim coming times,
> May know how my heart went with them
> After the red-rose-bordered hem.(7)

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1) Poems, P. 213.
2) Autobiographies, P. 190.
3) ibid., P.P. 189-90.
4) Poems, P. 226.
5) ibid; P. 234.
6) ibid.
7) ibid., P. 236.

Perhaps the best of the poems in The Rose are those inspired by Yeats' love for Maud. He had written love poetry prior to his meeting with her, but it was all the vague, romanticized product of a spirit that had never experienced the emotion that it was attempting to portray. Now, however, he had felt love in at once its most painful and most inspiring form. The result was a poetry that shows a fresh depth and awareness, a melancholy moderated by tenderness. 'A Dream of Death', written when Maud was seriously ill; 'A Dream of a Blessed Spirit'; and 'The Pity of Love' are all delicate, insignificant lyrics full of this tender melancholy; while 'The White Birds',[1] composed in memory of a day Maud and he spent together on the cliffs near Howth after Yeats first proposed,[2] is his vain plea to her to leave her world of fire and strife and come with him;

> Soon far from the rose and the lily, and fred of the flame would we be,...
> Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us no more.[3]

Also written to Maud were the two immortal lyrics; 'The Sorrow of Love'[4] (the poet's later alterations of which caused a great dispute), and 'When You Are Old',[5] undoubtedly the finest poem in the book and a striking example of what Yeats could achieve at this time.

> When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
> And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
> And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
> Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;
>
> How many loved your moments of glad grace,
> And loved your beauty with love false or true;
> But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
> And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

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1) Poems, P. 219.
2) ibid, P. 220.
3) Jeffares, P. 68.
4) Poems, P. 217.
5) ibid., P. 218.

And bending down beside the glowing bars
Murmur, a little sad, 'From us fled Love;
He paced upon the mountains far above,
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

In his autobiography, Yeats writes of this period that, "I was soon to write many poems where an always personal emotion was woven into a general pattern of myth and symbol".[1] The first manifestations of this new trend may be seen in the three 'Rose' poems included in this section; 'The Rose of the World', 'The Rose of Peace', and 'The Rose of Battle'. Though Maud is again the inspiration for these verses, his love is now expressed through an increasingly involved symbolism. In the first, and most successful, of these experiments, 'The Rose of the World',[2] we find for the first time the Helen symbol attached to Maud, an association that was to continue in his poetry for many years to come. It is evident that he has been reading Homer, and the fancied parallel between ancient Troy and contemporary Ireland, later to become a dominant theme in his verse, seems to have occurred to him at once;

For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
.....
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usna's children died.[3]

The linking up of Maud with Helen and the Irish tragic heroine, Deirdre is obvious, as is the implied connection between his tragedy and that of Paris and the sons of Usna, Deirdre's lovers. Beyond this may even be seen the first faint glimmerings of what was to become Yeats' theory of the gyres; his belief that every so many thousand years events and situations repeated themselves as the world came full circle.[4]

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1) Autobiographies, P. 187.
2) Poems, P. 208.
3) ibid; P. 208,
4) Henn, The Lonely Tower, Chap. 11.

The other two experiments proved somewhat less successful. 'The Rose of Peace'[1] is an overdrawn piece, without value or significance, while in 'The Rose of Battle'[2] Yeats various interpretations of his symbol become confused, resulting in a poem at times powerful but more often disorganized and oversubtle. All that seems clear is that the poet is beginning to realize that he has sought in woman"...more than is in rain or dew,/"or in the sun and moon, or on the earth".[3] He is coming to feel that his passion is hopeless; that he is one of those for whom love has "b[illegible]

> "but come to cast a song into the air,
> and singing past to smile on the pale dawn".[4]

In general, the poems of The Rose show a marked advance in style and technique. There is little of the clumsiness and uncertainty that mars so much in Crossways. The pieces on Shepherds and Indians are gone, leaving his subject matter almost exclusively Irish. Meanwhile, his increasing knowledge of occult lore is beginning to provide him with more symbols;[5] cryptic, private ones that he is starting to introduce deliberately and systematically into his poetry. A constant, morbid preoccupation with the horrors of old age, which, in view of Yeats attitude in later years, must be seen as more than a poetic convention, appears[6] side by side with the same rather adolescent air of melancholy that hangs over the verses in Crossways. Only a rare, distant note of exuberance or exultation is heard,[7] for, though between twenty-five and twenty-seven years of age when these poems were written, Yeats is still the moody romantic, lost in the fragrant mist of his own dreams, catching only occasionally through that mist glimpses of a starker reality. Ideas are present in a number of the verses, but they are ideas that are only half-seen, half-grasped. He perceives a piece of ultimate wisdom

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1) Poems, P. 204.
2) ibid., P. 210
3) ibid. P. 210.
4) ibid., P. 211.
5) for example, cypress, yew and lily; PP. 221, 215.
6) Who Goes With Fergus? 'The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner'.
7) 'To Ireland In the Coming Times'

and puts it into his verse. Yeats himself, however, does not yet quite recognize what it is that he has glimpsed, though he may attempt to disguise his ignorance with a cloud of vague words and symbols. Thus, after reading a poem such as 'The Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland',[1] we are left with the feeling of something hovering forever just beyond the edge of apprehension, like a strange figure dimly visible through a fog; a reality that is, nevertheless, unrecognizeable, intangible, Later, as the poet himself came to see more clearly, his verse became for a time more specific and direct. Even at this time, though his vision was uncertain, he did see something; "...to him, who ponders well,/ My rhymes more than their rhyming tell".[2] Again, in his autobiography he notes:

> "I was about to learn that if a man is to write lyric poetry he must be shaped by nature and art to some one out of half a dozen traditional poses, and be lover or saint, sage or sensualist, or mere mocker of all life; and that none but that stroke of luckless luck can open before him the accumulated expression of the world. And this thought before it could be knowledge was an instinct".[3]

Even when he did get a clear idea, he would often tend to shroud it in a mist of words. He was convinced that;

> God loves dim ways of glint and gleam;
> To please Him well my rhyme must be
> A dyed and figured mystery
> Thought hid in thought, dream hid in dream.[4]

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1) Poems, P. 223.
2) 'To Ireland In the Coming Times', Poems, P. 235.
3) Autobiographies, P. 107.
4) Wade, Bibliography, P. 25, written by W.B. Yeats on an inscribed copy of The Countess Kathleen and Other Legends and Lyrics.

CHAPTER 111

BROADENING HORIZONS: DEEPENING EMOTIONS

A. The Death of Parnell

In October of 1891 Charles Stewart Parnell died.[1] The factional bitterness that preceded and followed this event disillusioned many people, and turned sensitive minds against party politics. Suddenly the way seemed open for Yeats' imaginative movement.[2] Looking back, he recalls that he felt "The sudden emotion that now came to me, the sudden certainty that Ireland was to be like soft wax for years to come, was a moment of supernatural insight".[3] Here was his chance to test his theory that the nation could be united by recalling to all its people in a new, popular literature their common tradition. "Have not all races had their first

1) Encyclopedia Brittanica, Encyclopedia Brittanica Co. Ltd., 1929, Vol.17,P.336.
2) Hone, P. 108.
3#) Autobiographies, P. 245.

unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill?" he asks.

> "We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes...and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all,

artist and poet, craftsman and day labourer would accept a common design?"[1]

He went about the country forming various literary societies---'The Irish Literary Society' in London, 'The National Literary Society' in Dublin[2] ---and gathered the best of the Irish essays and stories he had written for periodicals[3] into a volume called The Celtic Twilight. As first published in 1893[4] (he continued to add to it for the next ten years),[5] the book is a conglomeration of the legends, tales and traditions that he had gathered in and about Sligo. The majority of the pieces contain a large element of the supernatural and show unquestioning belief in fairies. "In Ireland there is something of timid affection between men and spirits,[6]" he writes, saying of a man who, after collecting fairy tales, altered them for publication that "he was continually guilty of that great sin against art---the sin of rationalism".[7] The increasing intensity of his own mystic experiences is revealed in the account he gives of the visions that frequently appeared to him:

> "Sometimes when I have been shut off from common interests, and have for a little forgotten to be restless, I get waking dreams, now faint and shadow-like, now vivid and solid-looking, --like the material world under my feet. Whether they be faint or vivid, they are ever beyond the power of my will to alter in any way. They have their own will, and sweep hither and thither, and change according to its commands".(8)

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1) Autobiographies, P. 240.
2) ibid., P. 246.
3) Jeffares, P. 90.
4) Wade, P. 26.
5) Compare original version with that in Early Poems and Stories (1925).
6) W. B. Yeats, Celtic Twilight, Lawrence & Bullen 1893, P. 202.
7) Early Poems and Stories, P. 270.
8) Celtic Twilight, P. 169.

Apart from the above there is little of significance in a volume which is perhaps best described in his introduction to the first edition, where he writes; "Next to the desire, which every artist feels, to create for himself a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, and significant things of this marred and clumsy universe, I have desired to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland..." [2]

Not content with merely forming literary groups and supplying them with literature, he also felt that the time had come to "create an Irish theatre".[3] With this idea in mind he wrote the one-act play The Land of Heart's Desire".[4] A slight piece, it is again an allegory based on his love for Maud Gonne. A young bride, lost in dreams of fairyland and of things more glorious than domestic captivity, lets the fairies into her home on May-day Eve, and, given a choice between the rather placid love of her young husband and a wild, free life as one of the Sidhe, chooses to go with the spirits. Apart from the fact that Maud, unlike the bride, never hesitated between her friendship for Yeats and her duty to Ireland, a fact that Yeats could not have been aware of at this time, the allegory is clear and uncomplicated. The introductory epigram, "O rose, thou art sick",[5] again from Blake, reveals the despair into which the thought of Maud's indifference was driving him at this time.

The play was produced at the Avenue Theatre, London, in 1894 as a curtain raiser for Shaw's Arms and the Man.[6] With Florence Farr, to whom it was dedicated, in the leading role, it was well recieved by the critics,[7] thus confirming Yeats in his conviction that poetic drama could be successfully produced on the modern stage.

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1) Celtic Twilight, P. 169.
2) ibid., Preface.
3) Autobiographies, P. 246.
4) Poems, P. 157.
5) Poems, P. 158.
6) Jeffares, P. 95.
7) Ibid.

Among those interested in this new endeavor of the young poet was the already famous Irish novelist George Moore, who, in his autobiography Hail and Farewell, gives an impression of Yeats as seen by an outsider--- one of the few we possess. The description he gives us is particularly valuable for Moore was an accomplished satirist who, though he collaborated with Yeats in the founding of a National Theatre, never got along too well with him. Yet, though he never succumbed to his spell, Moore, in his own rather irreverent way, is obviously trying to treat his subject impartially.

"When I saw him," "he relates", "he was on exhibition, striding to and forth at the back of the dress circle, a long black cloak drooping from his shoulders, a soft black sombrero on his head, a voluminous black silk tie flowing from his collar, loose black trousers dragging untidily over his long, heavy feet".[1] Later Moore was invited to dine with Yeats. "When we arrived the poet," "he writes," was seated in front of a large steak, eating abstractedly, I thought, as if he did not know what he was eating--- which was indeed the case".[2] After the meal he "went away, leaving me under the impression that he looked upon himself as the considerable author and that to meet me at dinner at the 'Cheshire Cheese' was a condescension on his part".[3] When the pair were alone together in the poet's rooms, however, Yeats lost his aloofness in the excitement of storytelling and literary conversation. "Yeats and his style were the same thing; and his strange oldworld appearance and his chanting voice enabled me to identify him with the stories he told me,,, 'No dialect is ugly', he said; "the bypaths are all

1) Ave, 1911, P.P. 45-46 Moore G. Hail and Farewell, W.Heineman Ltd., London Vol. 1.
2) ibid. P. 47.
3) ibid., P. 51.

beautiful. It is the broad road of the journalist that is ugly'".[1] Some months afterward, at a dinner where various men of letters gave speeches, when the time came for Yeats to speak, he rose majestically, "and a beautiful commanding figure he seemed at the end of the table, pale and in profile, with long nervous hands and a voice resonant and clear as a silver trumpet".[2] His laugh Moore recalls as "one of the most melancholy things in the world",[3] while "his black hair and yellow skin were perhaps accidents, or they might be atavisms. It was not the recurrence of any Finnish strain of a thousand years ago that tempted me to believe in a strain of Oriental blood; it was his subtle, metaphysical mind, so unlike anything I had ever met in a European".[4]

B. New Acquaintances and Influences.

Meanwhile, Yeats horizons were broadening. Just before his play was produced he had made his first visit to France, to see Maud in Paris, where he had met Verlaine,[5] and seen Villiers de L'Isle Adam's play Axel.[6] The latter made a deep impression on him.

> "Count Villiers de L'Isle Adam swept together words behind which glimmered a spiritual and passionate mood...and created persons from whom has fallen all even of personal characteristic except a thirst for that hour when all things shall pass away like a cloud, and a pride like that of the Magi following their star over many mountains", (7)

he writes. One line from the play especially fascinated him, and he never

1) Ave, P.P. 55-57.
2) ibid., P. 150.
3) ibid., P. 349.
4) ibid., P. 244.
5) Autobiographies, P. 421.
6) Jeffares, P. 94.
7) Autobiographies, P. 262

ceased to be fond of quoting it: "As for living, our servants will do that for us".[1]

Fascinated by this glimpse of continental literature, he went to live with the critic Arthur Symons,[2] of whom he writes: "my thoughts gained in richness and in clearness from his sympathy, nor shall I ever know how much my practice and my theory owe to the passages that he read me from Catullus and from Verlaine and Mallarme".[3]

The slow maturing that was taking place during these years of the mid-nineties---Yeats was thirty by this time, and still behaved like an overwrought undergraduate---was accelerated by his first illicit affair. 'Diana Vernon' as he calls her, a cultured, unhappily married woman of classic beauty, fell in love with him and was able for a few months to alleviate the misery Maud was causing him.[4] "I noticed that she was like the mild heroines of my plays", he writes in his unpublished autobiography, "She seemed a part of myself...(she) had the same sensitive look of destruction I had admired in Eva Gore-Booth...Her beauty, dark and still, had the nobility of defeated things".[5] So strong and pure had been his ideal love for Maud that, until this time, he evidently had not so much as thought of any other woman in a more that purely impersonal way, for he recalls; "I do not think I knew any way of kissing for when on our first railway journey together she gave me the long passionate kiss of love I was startled and a little shocked".[6] Though the affair lasted only a year, thoughts of Maud soon repossessing and estranging the poet, there can be little doubt that, as Dr. Jeffares concludes, "the experience was

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1) Autobiographies, P. 376; Introduction to The Secret Rose.
2) Hone, P.P. 127-28.
3) Autobiographies, P. 394.
4) Jeffares, P.P. 100-102.
5) Jeffares, P. 101.
6) Ibid, P. 102.

...salutary to Yeats, and to him it seemed that she saved his soul and inmost being".[1]

During this period (1895-97) Yeats came into contact with most of the people who were to help him escape from the world he had built himself and in which he was in danger of becoming lost. In 1896 he spent several days at Tulyra Castle in Galway as the guest of Symons' friend Edward Martyn,[2] from where he got his first sight of "that country of limestone rock, storm-beaten trees and old towers, which lies between Galway Bay and the Clare hills, and is the landscape of so much of his later poetry".[3] During his stay he visited the Aran Islands in Galway Bay, and was deeply impressed by the primitive life and colorful speech of the people.[4] Finally, to complete this eventful holiday, he met Lady Gregory, who was taken at once with the young poet and invited him to stay at nearby Coole any time.[5]

In the autumn of the same year Yeats visited Paris again, where he first met John Synge,[6] It was a momentous occasion, though it is doubtful if either man realized the fact at the time. "He told me that he had learned Irish at Trinity College, so I urged him to go to the Aran Islands and find a life that had never been expressed in literature, instead of a life where all had been expressed",[7] Yeats tells us in perhaps the most widely quoted statement in his autobiographies. He goes on however, to admit that "I did not divine his genius, but I felt he needed something to take him out of his morbidity and melancholy. Perhaps I would have given the same advice to any young Irish writer who knew Irish".[8]

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1) Jeffares, P. 101.
2) Jeffares, P. 105.
3) Hone, P.P. 133-34.
4) Autobiographies, P. 424.
5) Jeffares, P. 106.
6) Autobiographies P. 423.
7) ibid.
8) ibid.

C. The Secret Rose.

During these years of feverish activity Yeats seems to have been trying to still the demon that tortured his mind. The despair brought on by his hopeless love for Maud tormented him till he ~~explained~~ exclaimed, "I wonder at moments if I was not really mad".[1] The unsettling influence exerted by MacGregor Mathers and his esoteric cultists, further confused and depressed him.[2] This confusion and despair, hardly visible in his poetry, is strikingly apparent in the tales of The Secret Rose, a volume of prose fiction published in 1897 and containing stories written during the four preceding years.[3]

On the back of the title page he departs from his usual procedure by inserting two epigrams. The first is his favorite line from Axel, 'As for living, our servants will do that for us.' The second, a quotation from Leonardo da Vinci's notebook, aside from revealing a growing knowledge of continental literature, serves as a somewhat bitter reminder to Maud that she will not always be beautiful; "Helen, when she looked in her mirror, seeing the withered wrinkles made in her face by old age, wept, and wondered why she had twice been carried away". In the dedication to the first edition, he adds a rebuke to his overzealous Irish patriot friends and a statement of his creed.

> "My friends in Ireland sometimes ask me when I am going to write a really national poem or romance...built up out of the thoughts and feelings which move the greater number of patriotic Irishman. I on the other hand believe that poetry and romance cannot be made by the most conscientious study of famous moments and of the thoughts and feelings of others, but only by looking into that little, infinite, faltering, eternal flame that one calls one's self".[4]

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1) Jeffares, P. 107, unpublished autobiography.
2) Autobiographies, P.P. 413-23.
3) Wade, Bibliography, P.P. 38-39.
4) Yeats, W.B., The Secret Rose, Lawrence and Bullen, London 1897.

The volume is introduced by the poem 'To The Secret Rose', (2) and invocation to his muse of Beauty;

> ...I too await
> The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
> When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
> Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?
> Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,
> Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose? (3)

The primary value of the stories which follow is in the very considerable light that they throw on Yeats' mind and personality during this period of stress and bewilderment. That strange and frightening story, 'The Crucifixion of the Outcast'[4], in which monks like figures from a depraved nightmare insult and crucify the last of the gleemen, leaving him abandoned at last even by the other outcasts, to be eaten alive by the crows and wolves, is probably one of the most frightening things that Yeats ever wrote. It is the product of a mind sick with despair and fancied persecution; the author clearly identifies himself with the gleeman and feels himself not only crucified by the Catholics, but abandoned by his own people as well.

Something of the same sense of the inevitable and terrible destiny of the superior individual, this time in attempting to help the common people, is seen again in the next story, 'Out of the Rose', (5). The old knight who has spent all his life fighting in the service of the Rose without reward, and who dies aiding the ignorant, avaricious, ungrateful peasants against their oppressors, is again an extension of the author, "one of those who have come but seldom into the world, and always for

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~~1) The Secret Rose.~~
2) Secret Rose, P. ix.
3) ibid., P. x.
4) ibid. P. 36.
5) ibid, P. 53.

its trouble...the dreamers who must do what they dream, the doers who must dream what they do". (1)

It is not until the story 'The Wisdom of the King', (2) however, that what Yeats is trying to say receives adequate expression. A prince is visited when still in the cradle by the women of the Sidhe, who claim him for one of their own. The only outward evidence that the child is more than human, however, is that, mingled with his hair, the feathers of the grey hawk grow on his head---a deformity obviously symbolic of a soaring, solitary wisdom and joy. The king dies, and the wise men of the kingdom, to insure against the strife that would follow a battle for the succession, pass a law ordering all the people to mix the feathers of the grey hawk with their own hair so that the boy will not realize that he is not as others. The prince grows into a just and honored ruler with a mind in which is evident great, but subtle and disturbing, wisdom. He falls in love with a visiting princess, then one day finds her in the arms of a page. Asked why she cannot love him, she tells the young king that she hates and fears him because of the unnatural hawks' feathers that grow with his hair. The king returns to the palace, severely rebukes the folly and presumption of those who hid from him the fact that he was different from other men, and departs, triumphant in his superiority and solitude.

Here we see brought clearly into the open his estrangement from the rest of mankind that is at once a misery and a glory. The man claimed by the gods as one of their own---by easy implication the poet---possesses a more-than-human knowledge; a wisdom that is "deadly to mortal things". (3) The young king , a transparent mask for Yeats himself, has become "busy with

1) Secret Rose, P. 53.
2) ibid, P. 11.
3) Secret Rose, P. 23.

strange and subtle thoughts which came to him in dreams, and with distinctions between things long held the same and with the resemblance of things long held different". (1) When others listened to him "his words seemed to make all darkness light and filled their hearts like music; but, alas, when they returned to their own lands his words seemed far off...too strange and subtle to help them to live out their hasty days". (2) Though many lives are changed by his words, none are changed for the better. Those who had thought that they served a good cause, hearing him praise it, return to find it less worthy, having learned how little separates truth from falsehood. (3) Others, once content at home, have now been shown higher things to aim at than domestic security; while youths who were once satisfied with ordinary pleasures have had their passions fired till they "sought impossible joys and grew unhappy". (4)

The terrifying wisdom and self-knowledge shown in the piece, even when a considerable element of self-dramatization is allowed for, is far ahead of anything in his poetry of this time, or even considerably later. It is the record of a mind tormenting itself deliberately, tearing aside the veils of illusion in a search for the horror rather than the glory of truth. He even seems to take a certain pleasure in shattering his illusions about Maud, a woman who, like the princess of the story "was beautiful, with a beauty unlike that of other women; but her heart was like that of other women". (5) He had laid down before her all his wisdom and "thought she understood because her beauty was like wisdom", (6) while all the time she was afraid of the hawks' feathers in his hair---the high, lonely, and infinitely unsettling wisdom of the poet.

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1) Secret Rose, P. 17.
2) ibid., P. 18.
3) ibid.
4) Early Poems and Stories, P. 349.
5) ibid.
6) ibid. (these sentiments are present in the Secret Rose, but at that time Yeats had not the power to express them so clearly as he could in later years).

The remainder of the stories in this volume serve mainly to illustrate the statement included in the dedication to the first edition that, "Although I wrote these stories at different times and in different manners, and without any definite plan, they have but one subject, the war of the spiritual with the natural order". (1) In this conflict the Catholic Church is alternated rather unpredictably between the camp of the enemy---the 'natural order' ---as when the monks crucify the gleeman, and the side of the spiritual, as when the riders of the Sidhe avenge the massacre of the White Friars by leading the guilty troop of traitor Irish into the abyss of Lug-na-Gael.(2) The old conflict between Christianity and the pagan faith of ancient Ireland is still very much in Yeats' thoughts, though at this point there are glimmerings of a possible solution. Perhaps 'Patrick's doctrine' is really no more than "merely the doctrine of the gods set out in new symbols"; (3) perhaps the heaven of the one is the same as the heaven of the other. (4)

In these stories that make up the latter part of the volume there is a peace and gentleness, a return to the land of misty beauty, in sharp contrast to the brooding, even frightening tone of the earlier pieces. However, the stories are not arranged in chronological order. From a bibliography of Yeats' (5) work we can see that they were written at the same time as the more unsettled pieces. They would seem merely products of the periods of comparative calm that evidently alternated with the fits of despair the poet endured at this time.

Included in the same volume are the Stories of Red Hanrahan, in which, as in most of the pieces in the book, Yeats, rather than recording fragments

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(1) Secret Rose, P. vii.
2) ibid, 'The Curse of the Fires and Shadows', P. 67.
3) ibid, P. 212, 'The Old Men of the Twilight'
4) This is the implication that forms the basis of 'The Heart of the Spring', The Secret Rose, P. 80.
5) Wade, Bibliography, P.P. 38-39.

of myth he has gathered at random, has turned mythmaker himself. Of all his prose creations, he was perhaps fondest of this red-haired, itinerant schoolmaster, (1) into whom, again, he put something of his own nature, although there is less personal identification in these tales than in most of the other stories of The Secret Rose.

The allegory and symbolism in Yeats' Prose is much less condensed, much clearer and more obvious, than that found in his poetry. On the other hand, the location of the events that are related, when any definite setting is used, is still his native Sligo. Ben Bulben and Knocknarea, Rosses and Dead Man's point, Cashel-na-Gael and Lug-na-Gael appear again and again, while the episode that forms the base for 'The Fires and the Shadows' is taken from Sligo history.

D. 'Rosa Alchemica'

To the year 1896 belong three other stories, the only ones Yeats ever wrote in which the Irish element is completely subordinated to his occult mysticism. Two of these, published separately, (2) are relatively unimportant, the author estimating their worth quite accurately when he wrote in a copy of them five years later; "The portrait which is by my father, and the Latin, which is by Lionel Johnson, are the only things which are worth anything in this little book". (3)

In the first of the two stories, 'The Adoration of the Magi', (4) we have the first use of the Leda symbol, (5) and, in the tale of three old men led to a woman who has given birth to a "cold, hard, and virginal "(6) unicorn-

1) See Collected Poems, P.P. 218-220, 'The Tower'.
2) Wade, Bibliography, P. 40.
3) Wade, Bibliography, P. 41
4) Early Poems and Stories, P. 517.
5) Poems and Stories, P. 520.
6) ibid.

like creature, a foreshadowing of the later poem 'The Second Coming'. (1) In 'The Tables of the Law' (2) we are introduced to Owen Aherne, who is to become one of Yeats' 'masks'. He already says of him here, as he might well have said of himself, that he "had the nature, which is half monk, half soldier of fortune, and must needs turn action into dreaming and dreaming into action; and for such there is no order, no finality, no contentment in this world"; (3) that he was one who loved "the beauty achieved by temperaments which seek always an absolute emotion, and which have their most continual, though not most perfect, expression in the legends and vigils and music of the Celtic peoples". (4)

It is the third of these stories, however, 'Rosa Alchemica' (5) --- the Alchemical Rose—that is of primary significance. Written when Yeats' love of pictorial effects had reached its height, a height that, as usual, he reached first in his prose, the style of the piece is often overornate; luxuriant and elaborate to an almost fatal degree. When we read such phrases as "tapestry, full of the blue and bronze of peacocks, fell over the doors and shut out all history and activity untouched with beauty and peace", (6) we come to feel that the author has followed his present path about as far as he can safely go. The plot too is weak and overwrought, and when it takes command, as it does in the latter sections, the piece becomes no more than a mediocre adventure story with mystic undertones. The tale is slow getting started, however, and in the lengthy first section we are given a somewhat fictionalized and romanticized, but basically accurate, picture of Yeats as he was---or at least as he very much liked to think

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1) Collected Poems, P. 210.
2) Early poems and Stories, P. 498.
3) ibid. P. 499.
4) ibid. P. 500.
5) Secret Rose, P. 221.
6) ibid. P. 222.

he was---at this time.

"I had gathered about me all gods because I believed in none", the narrator, a young mystic, relates, "and experienced every pleasure because I gave myself to none, but held myself apart, individual, indissoluble, a mirror of polished steel". (1) "I knew all a Christian's ecstasy without his slavery to rule and custom," he goes on. "I had all a pagan's delight in various beauty and without his terror at sleepless destiny and his labour with many sacrifices". (2) Lost in "the emptiness and silence of a world from which I had driven everything but dreams", (3) he cried out "as so many dreamers and men of letters in our age have cried, for the birth of that elaborate spiritual beauty which could alone uplift souls weighted with so many dreams". (4)

With all its pseudo-romantic over ornateness, the piece is still the ultimate cry of the young genius who beholds himself in splendid solitude ---with, however, ever present, the darker undercurrent, the overwhelming sense of an ironic and terrible futility, so that "even in my most perfect moment I would be two selves, the one watching with heavy eyes the other's moment of content". (5) There is also present in his mind a subtle foreboding, just stirring in Yeats at this time but destined to reach striking proportions, which makes him yearn for "simpler days, before men's minds, subtilized and complicated by the romantic movement in art and literature, began to tremble on the brink of some unimagined revelation". (6).

There is, throughout the piece, a strong undercurrent of Catholicism, the culmination of the violent feelings for and against the Church that surge through the stories of The Secret Rose. Though Yeats never joined the Church, and in later life became angry when people pointed out that his ideas, if followed to their logical conclusion, would lead him into the

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1) Secret Rose, P. 224.
2) ibid. P. 223.
3) ibid, P.P. 227-28.
4) ibid, P. 227.
5) ibid., P. 225.
6) ibid, P. 228.

Catholic Church, (1) it cannot be denied that his private theological system comes closer to Catholicism than to any other creed. By the end of his story, the narrator has embraced this creed, has "sought refuge in the only definite faith". (2) He carries a rosary about his neck and whenever he feels the evil spirits draw near "I press it to my heart and say; 'He whose name is Legion is at our doors decieving our intellects with sublety and flattering our hearts with beauty, and we have no trust but in Thee;*'and then...I am at peace". (3)

It might be argued, of course, that the Catholic atmosphere is introduced here as no more than a literary device. The tone, however, is sincere and respectful throughout whenever the Church is mentioned (when Yeats was antipathetic ot the Church, he never bothered to treat it gently), (4) and when we consider in addition the clearly evident self-identification between author and narrator, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that Yeats, in the confusion and frustration, bewilderment and despair that he faced at this time may for a moment have turned toward the Church as a possible haven.

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1) Jeffares, P.
2) Secret Rose, P. 240.
3) ibid. P. 264.
4) See, for example, 'Crazy Jane and the Bishop', Collected Poems, P. 290.

CHAPTER 1V

PERFECTION AND EXHAUSTION

A. Politics and a New Home.

Two things combined to bring Yeats out of the state of bewildered despair into which he had sunk; a renewal of political activity and the devoted attention of Lady Gregory.

Of the motives that actuated his new interest in politics, perhaps the greatest was the desire to protect Maud by doing his utmost to avoid any more riots such as marked Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897, when Yeats had had to use force to restrain his love from endangering herself. (1)

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1) Jeffares, P. 116.

A second reason for his renewed activity was a desire to take concrete steps toward imposing his ideal unity on Ireland. As a result he set to work at the futile task of trying to unite the two viciously quarrelling political groups of the time; the Parnellites and Anti-Parnellites. (1) He had himself named president of the Wolfe Tone Memorial Association because," it seemed to me that if I accepted the Presidency of the '98 Commemoration Association of Great Britain I might be able to prevent a public quarrel". (2) "I dreaded some wild Fenian movement, and with literature perhaps more in my mind than politics, dreamed of that Unity of Culture which might begin with some few men controlling some form of administration". (3) As a result of these fears and ambitions, "I went hither and thither speaking at meetings in England and Scotland and occasionally at tumultous Dublin conventions, and endured some of the worst months of my life." (4)

These strain of this time was eased somewhat by a retreat he had found to which he could retire whenever he chose and always be certain of a welcome. After he had published 'Rosa Alchemica', feeling that his verse was becoming "too elaborate, too ornamental", (5) he consulted a medium, and, concluding from the somewhat garbled message that he received that he should live for a time near woods and water, (6) accepted Lady Gregory's invitation to stay at her estate, Coole Park. "I was in poor health", he recalls; "the strain of youth had been greater than it commonly is, even with imaginative men, who must always, I think, find youth bitter, and I had lost myself besides as I had done periodically for years, upon Hodos Chameliontos". (7) Lady Gregory cared for him with an understanding and devotion that soon brought a return to health and mental stability.

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1) Autobiographies, P. 444.
2) ibid., P. 434.
3) ibid., P. 445.
4) Autobiographies, P. 436.
5) Ibid., P. 456.
6) Ibid.
7) ibid., P. 462.

From this time on he was to return to Coole for some weeks almost every summer, and so much did those visits and Lady Gregory's gentle discipline come to mean to him that in 1922 he writes in sincere tribute to this remarkable woman; "I doubt if I should have done much with my life but for her firmness and her care". (1)

This first visit to Coole did more for Yeats than merely restoring his equilibrium, however, for it was during this vacation that he saw his cherished, seemingly impossible dream of a National Theatre become a reality. "I told her that I had given up my project because it was impossible to get the few pounds necessary for a start in little halls, and she promised to collect or give the money necessary. That was her first great service to the Irish intellectual movement". (2) Adding to their number George Moore, who had had considerable stage experience, and Edward Martyn, a wealthy Catholic landlord who wrote plays for a hobby, the group finally managed to rent the Antient Concert Rooms in Dublin, where, in May of 1899, they launched the National Theatre with Yeats' Countess Kathleen and Martyn's Maeve. (3)

Meanwhile, the poet was preparing The Wind Among the Reeds for publication and writing a number of significant essays. In one of these, 'The Celtic Element In Literature', (4) we have his estimate of the aims and prospects of the Celtic movement, which he evidently felt, with the National Theatre now an actuallity, to be fairly launched. "A new fountain of legends, and, as I think, a more abundant fountain than any in Europe, is being opened, the fountain of Gaelic legends," he writes.

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1) Autobiographies, P. 464.
2) ibid., P. 467.
3) Jeffares, P.P. 130-32.
4) Essays, P. 213.

"The Celtic movement", as I understand it, is principally the opening of this fountain, and none can measure of how great importance it may be in coming times, for every new fountain of legends is a new intoxication for the imagination of the world. It comes at a time when the imagination of the world is ready...for a new intoxication. The reaction against the rationalism of the eighteenth century has mingled with a reaction against the materialism of the nineteenth century, and the symbolical movement...is certainly the only movement that is saying new things. The arts by brooding on their own intensity, have become religious...they must, as religious thought has always done, utter themselves through legends... the Irish legends move among known woods and seas and have so much of a new beauty, that they may well give the opening century its most memorable symbols". (1)

B. The Wind Among the Reeds.

At about this time Yeats' early thought and theory reached its culmination. In the essay from which I have quoted above, he says of his own convictions;

"I believe that the renewal of belief which is the great movement of our time will more and more liberate the arts from 'their age' and from life, and leave them more and more free to lose themselves in beauty and to busy themselves, like all the great poetry of the past and like religions of all times with the 'old faiths, myths, and dreams', the accumulated beauty of the age. I believe that men will more and more reject the opinion that 'poetry is a criticism of life' and be more and more convinced that it is a revelation of a hidden life". (2)

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1) Essays, P.P. 229-31.

2) Essays, P. 232.

The fruits of these beliefs may be found in The Wind Among the Reeds, which, together with the play The Shadowy Waters, marks the high point and end of Yeats' preoccupation with beauty as an abstract ultimate. The themes found here are much the same as those of the previous two volumes, but each form is carried to perfection, to the highest point to which it can reach.

The first poem, 'The Hosting of the Sidhe' (1) is typical of the book, with Niamh crying to all men "Away, come away; Empty your heart of its mortal dream". Irish mythology forms the setting for this piece, as for a number of the other verses; among them 'The Host of the Air' (2), "founded on an old Gaellic ballad that was sung and translated for me by a woman at Ballisodare"; (3) 'A Cradle Song'; 'The Song of the Wandering Aengus'; and 'The Blessed' (4), with its now familiar tone of dreaming wisdom;

> O blessedness comes in the night and the day
> And whither the wise heart knows;
> And one has seen in the redness of wine
> The Incorruptible Rose, (5)

It is the love poetry that is most prominent in this volume, however, both as to the number of verses and their quality. Though most of them were, as usual, inspired by and directed to Maud, a number of them grew out of the affair with 'Diana Vernon'. (6) In 'Michael Robartes Bids His Beloved Be At Peace', (7) the poet is overwhelmed by the "vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire". (8) Hearing the shadowy Horses of Disaster ---the inevitable end of their liason---pounding near, he would hide a

1) Yeats, W. B., The Wind Among the Reeds, Elkin Mathews, London, 1899, P. 1.
2) ibid., P. 7.
3) ibid., notes, P. 81.
4) ibid. P. 45.
5) ibid. P. 47.
6) Jeffares, P. 102.
7) Wind Among the Reeds, P. 24.
8) ibid., P. 25.

time from "their tossing manes and their tumultous feet" (1) in her love, "Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest". (2) In another of the poems written to Mrs. Vernon, 'Aedh Laments the Loss of Love' (3), he sums up the tragedy of their brief affair in certainly the most poignantly beautiful lines he ever wrote:

> Pale brows, still hands, and dim hair,
> I had a beautiful friend
> And dreamed that the old despair
> Would end in love in the end:
> She looked in my heart one day
> And saw your image was there;
> She has gone weeping away.

Under the various 'masks' that he assumes throughout this volume---Aedh, Hanrahan, Michael Robartes, Mongan---he sings song after song to Maud, the majority of them beautiful, insubstantial pieces with, running through all, the terrible sense of accepted futility and defeat, of a love that knows it longs in vain and yet cannot quell its longing. He hears in the sedge the wind crying;

> 'Until the axle break
> That keeps the stars in their round,
> And hands hurl in the deep
> The banners of East and West,
> And the girdle of light is unbound,
> Your head will not lie on the breast
> Of your beloved in sleep.' (4)

Still, he brings her with reverent hands "The books of my numberless dreams", (5) begging her that, since "I have spread my dreams under your feet", (6) she will "Tread softly because you tread on my dreams". No matter

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1) Wind Among the Reeds, P. 25.
2) ibid.
3) ibid., P. 21.
4) ibid. P. 43. 'The Cry of the Sedge'
5) ibid, 'A poet to His Beloved.' P. 29.
6) ibid., 'Aedh Wishes For the Cloths. of Heaven', P. 60.
7) ibid., P. 60.

what she may do to him his pen shall defend her against those who have attacked her, and in the long run it will be his words, not theirs, which shall prevail;

> They have spoken against you everywhere,
> But weigh this song with the great and their pride;
> I have made it out of a mouthful of air,
> Their children's children shall say they have lied. (1)

The new obscurity that was first noticeable in several of the poems in the Rose, a deliberate obscurity bound up closely with the use of certain definite symbols as distinguished from the vague, largely haphazard type that is beginning to disappear, is more in evidence here. In many of the poems the symbols are taken almost entirely from Irish mythology, and can be deciphered only by one familiar with this mythology, and even then only in an arbitrary manner, there being no way of knowing how much private meaning has been added to the symbol. It is true, that Yeats was at some pains to explain the more obscure points in the copious notes he appended to the first edition, but these explanations often tend rather to confuse than clarify the situation---a fact acknowledged by the poet in his largely eliminating these notes from later editions.

To give an example of the extremes to which Yeats carried this early symbolism, in the one short poem, 'Mongan Laments the Change That Has Come Upon Him and His Beloved', (2) we have: the hornless deer and white hound with one red ear from the Usheen legend; the hazel wand (according to Irish legend, the Tree of Life was a hazel); (3) the bristleless boar coming out of the West ("a place of symbolic darkness and death"), (4) derived from the legend of Diarmuid and Grania, the boar symbolizing to Yeats,

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1) Wind Among the Reeds, P. 3.
2) ibid. P. 22.
3) ibid., Notes, P.P. 94-5.
4) ibid., Notes, P.P. 94-4.
(After No.L) 'Aedh Thinks of Those Who have Spoken Evil of His Beloved', P.44.

"the darkness that will at last destroy the gods and the world"; (1) and the Path of Stones' and 'Wood of Thorns', neither of which are explained. Again, in 'Aedh Pleads With the Elemental Powers' (2), we have the symbol-choked stanza;

> The Powers whose name and shape no living creature knows
> Have pulled the Immortal Rose;
> And though the Seven Lights bowed in their dance and wept,
> The Polar Dragon slept, (3)

Yeats here is like a child fascinated by a new game he has just discovered, and who has yet to learn to play it in moderation. As a result, though he was later to accomplish a great deal in this involved, deliberately cryptic form, his experiments at this stage result in the only really poor poems in an otherwise excellent collection. As Stephen Spender has remarked in his book The Destructive Element, "the symbolism, the magic and the twilight are all interwoven, and the symbols therefore lose power because they are not sufficiently isolated". (4) Still, though he could not yet do as he chose with his symbols, Yeats knew what he was after.

> "It is only by ancient symbols, by symbols that have numberless meanings beside the one or two the writer lays an emphasis upon, or the half-score he knows of, that any highly subjective art can escape from the barrenness and shallowness of a too-conscious arrangement, into the abundance and depth of nature". (5)

In other poems, slight mystical pieces that read like a half-formed thought, obscurity is found in a symbolism entirely private, and, the

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1) Wind Among the Reeds, P. 98.
2) ibid., P. 57.
3) ibid.
4) The Permanence of Yeats, ~~ed~~ P. 188.
5) Essays, P. 107 (from 'The philosophy of Shelley's Poetry').

reader feels, undefined even in the author's mind. Of these we have three examples; 'The Moods', The Fisherman,' and the haunting 'Everlasting Voices';

> O sweet everlasting Voices be still;
> Go to the guards of the heavenly fold
> And bid them wander obeying your will
> Flame under flame, till time be no more;
> Have you not heard that our hearts are old,
> That you call in birds, in wind on the hill,
> In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore?
> O sweet everlasting Voices, be still. (1)

In other poems, the poet descends wholly into the world of dreams. Of this last group, the most famous is the lyric vision 'The Cap and the Bells' (2) of which he writes; "I dreamed this story exactly as I have written it....(it) was more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent, and gave me the sense of illumination and exultation that one gets from visions". (3)

About this time Yeats seems also to have been formulating the first outline of what was to become his theory of the 'mask', and with his usual enthusiasm when possessed with a new idea hid himself behind a bewildering array of alter-egos; Aedh, Hanrahan, Mongan, and Michael Robartes. In his notes he says that he has used these figures "more as principles of mind than as actual personages"; calling Hanrahan "the simplicity of an imagination too changeable to gather permanent possessions"; Robartes, "the pride of the imagination brooding upon the greatness of its possessions"; and Aedh, "the myrrh and frankincense that the imagination offers continually before all that it loves".(4) Actually, all of them were nothing more than what Jeffares refers to a "merely shadowy projections of various aspects,

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1) Wind among the Reeds, P. 3.
2) Ibid. P. 32.
3) ibid., Notes P.P. 94-95.
4) ibid., Notes, P.P. 73-74.

of his personality". (1)

Occasional hints of the future Yeats are also found in this volume. In 'The Travail of Passion' (2) he goes for a moment beyond Ireland, making use of symbols from Christ's passion to epitomize human misery.

> Our hearts endure the scourge, the plaited thorns, the way
> Crowded with bitter faces, the wounds in palm and side,
> The hyssop-heavy sponge, the flowers by Kidron stream...

In 'The Poet Pleads With His Friend For Old Friends' (3) we are struck by a sudden sureness of touch, an incisive, economical clarity unlike anything we have seen before:

> Though you are in your shining days,
> Voices among the crowd
> And new friends busy with your praise,
> Be not unkind or proud,
> But think about old friends the most:
> Time's bitter flood will rise,
> Your beauty perish and be lost
> For all eyes but these eyes.

On the whole, the outside world enters little if at all into the visions evoked in The Wind Among the Reeds. Yeats is almost completely immersed in himself. True, there is an occasional fresh note, a seeking of new paths; but there is about the majority of the poems a feeling that the poet has brought the pursuit of beauty for its own sake as far as he can. It is to Yeats' credit that he himself saw and recognized this fact,

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1) Jeffares, P. 112.
2) Wind Among the Reeds, P. 52.
3) ibid., P. 54.

for, with his play 'The Shadowy Waters, published the next year, this is, as Jeffares notes, "his final poetry for poetry's sake, for beauty's sake!" (1)

C. The Shadowy Waters.

The play The Shadowy Waters has been called everything from "one of the most perfect expressions of the vague, enchanted beauty of the pre-Raphaelite school" (2) to "a drugged and vague thing". (3) It is the story of Forgael, who sails endlessly over strange seas, seeking a love that is not to be found in human life. He is advised by his practical friend Aibric to abandon the search, for;

> No man nor woman has lived otherwise
> Than in brief longing and decieving hope
> And bodily tenderness; and he who longs
> For happier love but finds unhappiness, (4)

In spite of this he chooses to follow his dream. However, significantly, he does not find the dream. His ship engages another and after a short battle is victorious. Aboard the captive bark is a queen, who comes to love him and wishes to share his search. Though reluctant to share his dream with her, Forgael finally accepts her offer of herself.

Thus there can be no doubt that the central theme here is, as Una Ellis-Fermor points out, "realization of ideal love in terms of, not by the superseding of, natural love". (5) This realization is, however, an extremely reluctant one, on Yeats' part, as on Forgael's. Though Dectora decides to stay with him, it is not until she severs the cord binding the

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L) Jeffares, P. 121.
2) Hone, P. 176 (made by T. S. Eliot).
3) Hoare, Dorothy, The Works of Morris and Yeats in Relation to Early Saga literature, University of Cambridge Press, P. 95.
4) Yeats, W.B.; The Shadowy Waters, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1900 PP.19-20
5) Ellis-Fermor, Una, The Irish Dramatic Movement, Methuen, London, P.102.

two ships together, and so gives him no choice, that he is persuaded to put up with her company. And he does not give up his search for the dream.

Aside from this central theme, there is little of importance in the poem. Word-heavy, thick with the symbols Yeats has not yet learned to use in moderation, full of exotic imagery that threatens at times to become cloying, the piece reveals just how close the poet came to overworking his early style.

Meanwhile, in the essays that Yeats wrote in the same year as the publication of The Shadowy Waters, we still find him writing of visions and dreams as the basis of all reality. "When I was a boy in Dublin", he says in the essay 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', (1) "I thought that whatever of philosophy has been made poetry is alone permanent. ...Since then I have observed dreams and visions very carefully, and am now certain that the imagination has some way of lighting on the truth that the reason has not". (2) In another essay published in the same year he goes on to say; "I doubt indeed if the crude circumstances of the world, which seems to create all our emotions, does more than reflect, as in multiplying mirrors, the emotions that have come to solitary men in moments of poetical contemplation". (3)

Yet, he seems almost at the same time to sense that he may soon change his views. "All life is revelation beginning in miracle and enthusiasm, and dying out as it unfolds itself in what we have mistaken for progress. It is one of our illusions, as I think,...that life moves slowly and evenly

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1) Essays, P. 79.
2) Essays, P.P. 79-80.
3) Essays, 'The Symbolism of Poetry', P.P. 194-5.

towards some perfection. Progress is miracle, and it is sudden, because miracles are the work of an all-powerful energy, and nature in herself has no power except to die and to forget". (1) For Yeats the change came indeed with almost the suddenness of a miracle; by the next year his ideas had undergone striking expansion and revision.

With the publication of 'The Shadowy Waters there can be no dispute that "what one might call Yeats' first period comes to an end". (2).

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1) Essays, P. 211.
2) The Permanence of Yeats, P. 139 (David Daiches)

CHAPTER V

ALTERATION AND CRITICISM

Two questions must be considered before we leave this study of Yeats' first period. The first of these is in regard to the much disputed alterations made by the poet in his early verse.

A. Yeats' Revisions of His Early Poetry.

A great deal of criticism has been directed at Yeats for the changes that he eventually made in many of the poems of his first period. Most of this criticism will not stand up before a careful consideration of the facts.

To begin with, it was not only in the years after the turn of the century, when his style and thought had begun to change, that the poet became dissatisfied with the work he had done and began to revise it. From the first he

was in the habit of discarding, altering, and improving verse that did not satisfy ~~to~~ the increasingly high standards he set for himself. In the introduction to the first collected edition of his work, in 1895, he writes that he

> "has revised, and to a large extent re-written 'The Wanderings of Usheen' and the lyrics and ballads from the same volume, and expanded and, he hopes, strengthened 'The Countess Cathleen'. He has, however, been compelled to leave unchanged many lines he would gladly have re-written, because his present skill is not great enough to separate them from thoughts and expressions which seem to him worth preserving". (1)

As he grew older and became even more skilled at his craft, is it not logical, and proper, that he should have continued this habit? Yeats the artist was a perfectionist; as he came to have a more perfect idea of what constituted good poetry it is only natural that, with his love of beauty and perfection of form, he should be unable to tolerate the more commonplace and imperfect of his earlier lyrics and be driven to improve them, even if this meant, as it often did, the complete rewriting of a poem. Even when he could change a piece for the better by the addition or substitution of a single word, or a single letter, he did so. For example, in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd' the only alteration made between 1895 and the year of the poet's death was the replacing of the line "The kings of old time are fled" (2) with the more accurate and less pseudo-romantic "The kings of old time are dead".(3) Again, in 'the Countess Cathleen', as it appears in Poems, we have, in the fragment of verse which later appeared alone under the title 'Who Goes With Fergus',

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1) Poems, Introduction, P.V.
2) Poems, P. 239.
3) Collected Poems (1952), P. 7.

the lines"...lift your tender eyelids, maid,/And brood on hopes and fears no more". (1) By 1939 only one letter has been changed, to give us the subtle shift in emphasis and less trite phraseology of "...lift your tender eyelids, maid,/And brood on hopes and fear no more". (2)

The two objections most frequently made to Yeats' revisions are that they destroy the beauty, and twist the thought of the original poem. These charges are for the most part groundless. Almost all of the best poetry of his early period is left untouched; most of the second-best only partly revised. Such pieces, for example, as: "The Falling of the Leaves', (3) 'The Stolen Child', (4) 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', (5) 'The Cap and the Bells', (6) and 'The Lover Mourns For the Loss of Love'(7) remain unaltered in any way from their first appearance to the poet's death. Thus we are given ample opportunity to see what Yeats could do at this stage in his development. Why should we abuse him for being reluctant to continue to display what he could not do? For it is, with, perhaps, one exception, the inferior poems that he revised. Let us look at some examples.

First of all, there is the piece almost invariably chosen by those who desire to prove that the poet made a mistake in meddling with his early work; (8) 'The Sorrow of Love'. Here are both versions; first, that which appears in Poems (1895), then that which is found in the Collected Poems (1952).

> The quarrel of the sparrows in the eaves,
> The full round moon and the star-laden sky,
> And the loud sound of the ever-singing leaves,
> Had hid away earth's old and weary cry.

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1) Poems, P. 98.
2) Collected Poems, P. 48.
3) Poems, P. 256; O.P., P. 16.
4) Poems, P. 263; O.P., P. 20.
5) Poems, P. 213; C.P., P. 44.
6) The Wind Among the Reeds, P. 32;C.P.P.71.
7) Wind Among the Reeds, P. 21; C.P., P. 68.
8) The only exception is Dr. Jeffares.

And then you came with those red mournful lips,
And with you came the whole of the world's tears,
And all the sorrows of her labouring ships,
And all the burden of her myriad years.

And now the sparrows warring in the eaves,
The curd-pale moon, the white stars in the sky,
And the loud chaunting of the unquiet leaves,
Are shaken with earth's old and weary cry. (1)

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The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,
The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,
And all that famous harmony of leaves,
Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

A girl arose that had red mournful lips
And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,
Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers;

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,
And all that lamentation of the leaves,
Could but compose man's image and his cry. (2)

Here much can be said on the side of those who maintain that the poet should have left the poem alone. The spirit of the piece is much better expressed in the first version; the second is too harsh and pretentious, too grandiose for so sad and so simple a theme. Yeats' error was in trying to improve what was already as nearly perfect as it could be made. Against this single admitted misjudgement, let us, however, place some other examples of his revisions. First of all; 'The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner':

I had a chair at every hearth,
When no one turned to see,
With 'Look at that old fellow there,
'And who may he be?'
And therefore do I wander now,
And the fret lies on me.

1) Poems, P. 217.

2) Collected Poems, P. 45.

The roadside trees keep murmuring.
Ah, wherefore murmur ye,
As in the old days long gone by,
Green oak and poplar tree?
The well-known faces are all gone:
And the fret lies on me. (1)

Thus the poem stood in 1895. Now let us look at the version in the Collected Poems of 1952.

Although I shelter from the rain
Under a broken tree,
My chair was nearest to the fire
In every company,
That talked of love or politics,
Ere Time transfigured me.

Though lads are making pikes again
for some conspiracy,
And crazy rascals rage their fill
At human tyranny;
My contemplations are of Time
That has transfigured me

There's not a Woman turns her face
Upon a broken tree,
And yet the beauties that I loved
Are in my memory;
I spit into the face of Time
That has transfigured me. (2)

Actually, apart from the title and the underlying thread of thought, what we have here are two different poems. But who, given a choice between them, would not discard the earlier effort with its conventional, even trite treatment of a conventional poetic theme? The second version treats the same theme, but in the strikingly original manner that makes a great poem. Another example of the same thing, one that I will not take time to examine here, may be seen in the poem called in "The Wind Among the Reeds" 'Hanrahan Laments Because of His Wanderings', (3) which, stripped of its

1) Poems, P. 228.
2) C. P., P. 52.
3) The Wind Among the Reeds, P. 51.

superfluous symbolism and conventional romanticism, appears in the Collected Poems as the gentle and beautiful lyric 'Maid Quiet". (1)

Let us, however, take a poem less drastically revised than these; 'A Dream of Death', as it appears, first in 1895, then in 1952:

I dreamed that one had died in a strange place
Near no accustomed hand;
And they had nailed the boards above her face,
The peasants of that land,
And, wondering, planted by her solitude
A cypress and a yew:
I came, and wrote upon a cross of wood,
Man had no more to do:
'She was more beautiful than thy first love,
This lady by the trees.
And gazed upon the mournful stars above,
And heard the mournful breeze. (2)

I dreamed that one had died in a strange place
Near no accustomed hand;
And they had nailed the boards above her face,
The peasants of that land,
Wondering to lay her in that solitude,
And raised above her mound
A cross they had made out of two bits of wood,
And planted cypress round;
And left her to the indifferent stars above
Until I carved these words:
'She was more beautiful than thy first love,
But now lies under boards'. (3)

Here we see more clearly Yeats' method of revision. Those things in the old poem which were satisfactory he left untouched, changing only that which was awkward, superfluous, or oversentimentalized; tightening and tidying both the structure and thought of the piece. This procedure is the one he followed in almost all of his lesser revisions, where he would often alter only the occasional awkward stanza, as in the 'Ballad of the Foxhunter', where the lines;

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1) C. P. P. 78.

2) Poems, P. 221.

3) C. P., P. 47.

Now leave the chair upon the grass;
Bring hound and huntsman here,
And I on this strange road will pass,
Filled full of ancient cheer. (1)

are contracted to;

Put the chair upon the grass:
Bring Rody and his hounds,
That I may contented pass
From these earthly bounds. (2)

Perhaps he would revise only one or two unsatisfactory lines here and there throughout the poem, as in 'Fergus and the Druid,' where "A wild and foolish laborer is a King",/To do and do and do, and never dream", (3) becomes "A king is but a loolish labourer"/Who wastes his blood to be another's dream"; (4) or in 'The two trees', where "The ravens of unresting thought";/ Peering and flying to and fro",/To see men's souls bartered and bought". (5) becomes "The ravens of unresting thought";/Flying and crying, to and fro",/ "Cruel claw and hungry throat". (6)

The charge that Yeats changed the thought of the poetry to fit his own changing thought, is another which can hardly be substantiated. Almost invariably the basic thought was present from the first, as in 'The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner' (7) given above. He would define this thought

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1) Poems, P. 276
2) C.P., P. 27.
3) Poems, P. 201.
4) C.P., P. 37.
5) Poems, P. 233.
6) C.P., P. 55.
7) Thesis, P.P. 64-5.

more clearly, at most adding to it a few fresh ramifications or deleting ideas that seemed to him superfluous; no more. The thoughts and feelings that were but vaguely glimpsed and not entirely comprehended by the poet in his youth became clearer as he grew older, and he simply attempts to pass this new clarity of apprehension on to his readers.

Answering his critics in the dedication to the 1925 edition of his Early Poems and Stories, Yeats writes that a young girl once said to him;"'Innocence is the highest achievement of the human intellect', and as we are encouraged to believe that our intellects grow with our years, I may be permitted the conviction that---grown a little nearer innocence ---I have found a more appropriate simplicity". (1) Two years later, in the preface to an edition of his Complete Poems, he expressed himself even more clearly; "Whatever changes I have made are but an attempt to express better what I thought and felt when I was a young man". (2) Why should we doubt his word?

B. Criticisms of Yeats' First Period.

To complete this chapter of the thesis, I shall give a cross section and evaluation of the significant criticism available on Yeats' early poetry. The sum of this criticism is not large---the majority of the commentators have concentrated on the poet's later work---nor is its significance, on the whole, outstanding. As proof of this last statement we have D. S. Savage writing that "Inwardly he lacked the visionary intensity of the creative spirit, and his art developed peripherally, unaccompanied by any very interesting inward, personal development". (3)

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1) Early Poems and Stories. P. Vl.
2) Wade, Bibliography, P. 154.
3) Hall and Steinman, eds. The Permanence of Yeats, P. 197.

From such obvious absurdities we may turn to the generalization of critics like David Daiches, who states that, "His poetry was frankly escapist, like most early verse of nineteenth-century poets, and its purpose was not to interpret life but to compensate for it". (1) Now, it cannot be denied that Yeats was, to a certain extent, attempting to compensate for life; but to what degree, is open to question. Did he actually care for or miss that life for which he was trying to compensate? The dream world in which he existed was the one in which he was most at home; it was, perhaps, at the time more real to him than the actual world about him could ever be. Moreover, he did try to interpret life within this half-imaginary world in which he dwelt. His failure to do so lies in the fact that the life he was trying to interpret was in itself unreal, and so no satisfactory definition of it could ever be achieved.

Edmund Wilson, too, sees Yeats' early work as purely an escape from reality, an art which "presents the fascination of fairyland as something inimical to life in the real world" (2)---and thus once again oversimplifies to a dangerous extent. To the young poet this world of the imagination was very often far more real than the sordid, bewildering world of mankind.

Moreover, Yeats' fantasy was not compounded entirely of figments of his own imagination. From the first it rests, as Dorothy Hoare points out, "on reality---the reality of the countryside", (3) for "to Yeats the appearance of the Irish countryside did not convey only delight, but was bound up...with the idea of a remembered past". (4) This past was exem-

1) Permanence of Yeats, P. 124.
2) ibid., P. 20.
3) Hoare, Dorothy, The Works of Yeats and Morris in Relation to Early Saga Literature, Cambridge University Press, P. 93.
4) Ibid. P. 90.

plified in the infinitely fascinating legends of Ireland, which "represented an ancient magnificent ideal life in the contemplation of which he could withdraw from reality to the shadows of ancestral memory". (1) He chose these Irish legends, not because they were "more noble or more primitive than others", (2) but because they gave him "the feeling of historical continuity, of writing out of the heart of his own people and his own country". (3) The reason that he also chose so many of his symbols from this mythology was because, "symbolism, he believed, could provide a means of reaching back to those primitive and fundamental modes of apprehension; and the old mythologies could be used by the modern poet to this end". (4).

Professor Daiches is close to the truth when he writes concerning the young poet's early literary background that, "when Yeats first began writing poetry, he accepted as a matter of course the thinned-out romantic tradition which demands that poetry should be concerned with a 'beautiful' world of dream, employing a language chosen for its vague emotional suggestiveness and conventional poetic associations". (5) In fact, during his first period he might be not improperly called "the most gifted representative in English of an age of poets who were in reaction against their age because they did not understand it, and, for lack of an adequate humanism, mistook science and reason for their enemies". (6) Had Yeats been no more than this, however, he would have perished with the other poets of the nineties. As it was, he was far greater than they ever were---perhaps his most striking difference being, as D. S. Savage points out, "his combination of aestheticism with apparently alien factors---with Irish nationalism and occult supernaturalism". (7)

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1) Hoare, P. 141.
2) Hough, Graham, The Last Romantics. Gerald Dockworth & Co., London, 1949, P. 233.
3) ibid.
4) ibid, P. 236.
5) Permanence of Yeats, P.123.
6) ibid, P. 221 (Joseph Warren Beach).
7) ibid, P. 196.

As for his poetry itself, its effect on both author and reader has been well summarized by Edmund Wilson, who writes; "The world of the imagination is shown us in Yeats's early poetry as something infinitely delightful, infinitely seductive, as something to which one becomes addicted, with which one becomes delirious and drunken---and as something which is somehow incompatible with, and fatal to, the good life of that actual world which is so full of weeping and from which it is so sweet to withdraw". (1)

Perhaps the best, and certainly the most readable, critic of the early poetry, however, is Yeats himself, who writes in his autobiography that he sought "verses that were all picture, all emotion, all association, all mytholoby...I exalted Mask and Image above the eighteenth century logic...and set experience before observation, emotion before fact". (2) "I am certain there was something in myself compelling me to attempt creation of an art separate from everything heterogeneous and casual, from all character and circumstances...(3) a poetry that was before all else, speech or song." (4)

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1) Permanence of Yeats, P. 18.
2) Autobiographies, P. 262.
3) Ibid, P. 396.
4) ibid, P. 371.

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SECTION THREE

Out of the Mists; a Study of the Transitional Period, 1900-1910

CHAPTER 1

THE BREAK WITH THE PAST

A. New Thought.

By 1901 Yeats' ideas on many things had changed considerably. In keeping with his maturing theories, he outlined these new beliefs, clearly and precisely, in a number of essays published during this and the following year.

His experiments in the occult had led him to certain conclusions which he was to embody in his poetry, from this time forward. "I believe", he writes, "in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed; and I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times,

and been the foundations of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are---

1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols". (1) From this we can see that he had come to believe in the existence of a great Universal Memory, "a memory of nature that reveals events and symbols of distant centuries". (2) The key to the secrets held in this great memory was to be found in certain symbols, which "act, as I believe, because the great memory associates them with certain events and moods and persons". (3) He had found by experiment that various symbols could, in sensitive persons, evoke visions which had a basic similarity. Thus he came to seek for, in his poetry, ideas and images which had the power to call up the deep underlying memories of mankind, of nature herself. That is what he means by a symbol---something that is a clue to these past memories; that can evoke them. Even in cases when they communicated to others meanings that had never occurred to him these symbols would have served their purpose, having been the key to events that he could not percieve but which were still a part of the universal memory. "Whatever the passions of man have gathered about, becomes a symbol in the great memory", he writes. "The symbols are of all kinds, for everything in heaven or earth has its association, momentous or trivial, in the great memory, and one never knows what forgotten events may have plunged it, like the toadstool and the ragweed, into the great passions". (4)

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1) Essays, P. 33, 'Magic'.
2) ibid., P. 56.
3) ibid., P. 60.
4) Essays, P.P.60-61.

This theory of symbols may be seen developing as early as 'The Rose of the World', (1) where Yeats drew a parallel between the figures of Maud Gonne, Deirdre, and Helen of Troy. Eventually it was to evolve into the theory of the gyres of time which he expounded in A Vision.(2) His belief in the importance of symbols, seen as a confused enthusiasm in the poems of The Wind Among the Reeds, had grown till he can now write, "I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician, and the artist". (3) Going even further, he writes in 1902 that "allegory and, to a much greater degree, symbolism are a natural language by which the soul when entranced, or even in ordinary sleep, communes with God and with angels". (4) Having lost little of his affectation as yet, and, seeing himself as one of "those lean and fierce minds who are at war with their time, who cannot accept the days as they pass, simply and gladly", (5) he is ready to start out on a fresh crusade, for "at whatever risk, we must cry out that imagination is always seeking to remake the world according to the impulses and the patterns in that great Mind and that great Memory". (6)

This picture of the evolution of his theories regarding symbolism if of first importance. Other significant essays of these years reveal the rapid changes taking place in his ideas on the manner and object of his art. As we saw in the last section, he had brought to perfection, and exhaustion, the twilight style of the nineties. Now, only a year after the publication to The Shadowy Waters he seems to think of this part of his life as completely

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1) Poems, 1895, P. 208.
2) Henn, The Lonely Tower, Ch.11 P.P. 182-206.
3) Essays, P. 60.
4) ibid., P. 457.
5) ibid., P. 61.
6) ibid., P. 63.

over and done with. Speaking of it as he might of the distant past, he says "I wanted to write 'popular poetry'...for I believed that all good literatures were popular...I thought that one must write without care, for that was of the coteries, but with a gusty energy that would put all straight if it came out of the right heart". (1) He goes on to explain his new method, the desire for a discipline and deliberate thought that grew on him as his romantic fancies began to fade; "when I found my verses too full of the reds and yellows that Shelley gathered in Italy, I thought for two days of setting things right, not as I should now by making my rhythms faint and nervous and filling my images with a certain coldness, a certain wintry wildness, but by eating little and sleeping upon a board". (2)

Just as his experiments in the occult taught him to use symbolism in his verse, so the idea of poetry as itself as a form of cult or religion grew on him; "I learned from the people themselves, before I learned it from any book, that they cannot separate the idea of an art or a craft from the idea of cult with ancient technicalities and mysteries". (3) He saw easily enough that the arts had become estranged from the common people, and though, as was natural to a poet, he blamed them, claiming that "the mere business of living, of making money, of amusing oneself, occupies people more and more, and makes them less and less capable of the difficult art of appreciation", (4) he nevertheless realized that it was up to the artists to restore art to its rightful place in society. They must, if they would win the crowd, take on themselves "the method and fervour of a priesthood". (5) He attacks those poets who, as he had done, seek beauty for its own sake, creating a perfection only a few can understand or appreciate. The arts, he says, "have grown, as I think, too proud, too anxious to live alone with the perfect".(6) He has

1) Essays, P.5, 'What is Popular Poetry'
2) ibid., P.P. 5-6.
3) ibid., P. 12.
4) Essays, P. 250, 'Ireland and the Arts'
5) ibid.,
6) ibid., P. 251.

come to believe that the artist should found his work "on a passion which will bring him to many besides those who have been trained to care for beautiful things by a special education". (1)

This desire to create an art that could be understood by the common people was but a passing phase. Though Yeats was slow to realize the fact, it is, on the whole, incompatible with his increasing use of symbolism. ~~It was~~ His early verse, which he came to dislike has remained, deservedly the most widely popular. Indeed, it is significant that during the first decade of the century, when he tried to live up to this ambition of writing of and for the people, he produced little lyric poetry, turning instead to the stage, which ~~is~~ was, essentially, a medium more suited to his purpose. Not until he turned away from the common taste in disappointment and disgust and wrote to satisfy himself was he again to create great poetry.

Even, in the midst of his plans for creating an art that the people can appreciate, however, he does not abandon his belief that the artist's first duty is to himself. Writing in a tone that seems almost to contradict his previous remarks, he claims that no poet "should try to make his work popular. Onee he has chosen a subject he must think of nothing but giving it such an expression as will please himself...he must picture saint or hero, or hillside, as he sees them, not as he is expected to see them, and he must comfort himself, when others cry out against what he has seen, by remembering that no two men are alike, and that there is no "excellent beauty without strangeness". In this matter he must be without humility". (2)

Finally he attempts, not unsuccessfully, to reconcile his two attitudes, by saying that "art is not less the art of the people because it does not

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1) Essays, P. 252.
2) ibid., P.P. 254-55.

always speak in the language they are used to." (1) Change as he might, Yeats yet remained faithful to two ideals; the integrity and individuality of the artist, and his own duty towards and dream for Ireland; "I would have Ireland recreate the ancient arts...as they were understood when they moved a whole people and not a few people who have grown up in a leisured class and made this understanding their business". (2) Though his style must change, his subject matter---so he thought at this time---would always remain much the same. "I could not now write of any other country but Ireland", he says,

> "for my style has been shaped by the subjects I have worked on, but there was a time when my imagination seemed unwilling, when I found myself writing of some Irish event in words that would have better fitted in some Italian or Eastern event, for my style had been shaped in that general stream of European literature which has come from so many watersheds, and it was slowly, very slowly, that I made a new style. It was years before I could rid myself of Shelley's Italian light, but now I think my style is myself". (3)

As his ideas on form and content became clearer he wrote in 1903 that "The close of the past century was full of a strange desire to get out of form...I now feel an impulse to create form". (4) He had become dissatisfied with his earlier work and in a letter to Florence Farr in July reports that he is "at work on Shadowy Waters changing it greatly, getting rid of needless symbols, making the people answer each other, and making the ground work simple and intelligible...I am surprised at the badness of a great deal of it in its present form". (5)

Here, in his prose, we can glimpse the great changes that were taking place in Yeats' thought during the first three years of the new century.

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1) Essays, P. 255.
2) ibid., P. 254.
3) ibid., P. 256.
4) Hone, P. 1961.
5) Bax, C.,ed.,Letters; Florence Farr, Bernard Shaw. W.B.Yeats. Home and Vanthal Ltd.,London,1946.P.39.

He was turning to reality, seeking a sound basis for his theories. Alone of his contemporaries among the nineties poets, he saw that there were but two choices following the end of the century; to change or to perish. And though he gives much of the credit for his new wisdom to his studies in the occult, it is significant that these studies invariably led him along the course that common sense would have dictated. For a poet, Yeats was a singularly practical man.

B. Gathering Clouds.

The first years of the new century also saw the real beginning of the constant disappointments that were to follow the poet into old age, first driving him out of himself, then sending him back to seek reality in the depths of his own mind.

Maud had rejected Yeats' proposals of marriage with the same regularity with which they were forthcoming, but he had never given up. Writing in her autobiography she recalls one of these proposals, made in 1901, and her own reaction;

"Willie are you not tired of asking that question? How often have I told you to thank the gods that I will not marry you. You would not be happy with me".

'I am not happy without you'.

'Oh yes, you are, because you make beautiful poetry out of what you call your unhappiness and you are happy in that. Marriage would be such a dull affair. Poets should never marry. The world should thank me for not marrying you'". (1)

Yet, in spite of a growing acceptance of what he had always known subconsciously to be true, Yeats continued to hope. Now, however, the

1) Jeffares, P. 129.

gap began to widen. In 1901 Maud joined the Roman Catholic Church. (1) Even this might not have been an insuperable barrier; the poet's basic thought was never too far from Catholicism and the Church tolerates mixed marriages; but there was something far more fundamental than religious beliefs separating them. Maud, in her practical wisdom, knew what this difference was, and as was her way, faced reality squarely, accepted it, and conducted herself accordingly. "I have been happier than most", she writes in her autobiography, "but I don't think about it....You and I are so different in this". (2)

Yeats did think about himself continually; and as he thought he became almost resigned to a melancholy acceptance of the inevitable conclusion of his love, as may be seen in a number of pieces he added to The Celtic Twilight at this time. He writes of how a laboror once told him that "beauty never brought happiness to anybody. It was a thing, he said, to be proud of and afraid of". (3) Elsewhere, he repeats an anecdote narrated to him by an old shepherd who thought perhaps he might turn it into a poem. "Alas! I never made the poem, perhaps because my own heart, which has loved Helen and all the lovely and fickle women of the world, would be too sore. There are things it is well not to ponder over too much..."(4)

With all this, he was not prepared for the final blow, and when, in 1903, Maud married the rebel leader John MacBride, Yeats was "deeply hurt, shocked, and angry". (5)

Meanwhile, the attitude of the general public toward his efforts to establish a National Theatre was beginning to give him some idea of what he might expect from that quarter. Lady Gregory in her book Our Irish Theatre quotes a remark made by Yeats during a rehearsal in 1901 that reveals the exasperation that he must already have been feeling; "I was saying to

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2) Jeffares, P. 129.
1) Jeffares, P. 129.
3) Early Poems and Stories, P. 170.
4) ibid., P. 178.
5) Jeffares, P. 139.

myself 'Here are we, a lot of intelligent people who might have been doing some sort of decent work that leaves the soul free; yet here we are, going through all sorts of trouble and annoyance for a mob that knows neither literature nor art. I might have been away, away in the country, in Italy perhaps, writing poems for my equals or my betters". (1)

In this atmosphere of rapidly changing concepts, of laborious, uncongenial theatre work, and of constant, bitter disappointment Yeats concieved and wrote the poems of In the Seven Woods.

C. In The Seven Woods.

These poems were published in 1903.(2)Fourteen short pieces, they represent all the worthwhile lyric verse written in the preceding four years.

Though this work does not often come up to the standard of his, best efforts, it is nevertheless significant in showing his style in transition. Only two of the poems belong entirely to the nineties; 'Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland'(3) and 'The Happy Townland', (4) both revised versions of lyrics that first appeared in the Stores of Red Hanrahan in 1897. (5) Even by 1903 these vague, elaborate verses seem dated, out of place, weak shadows from the past.

In addition to these pieces, there are a number of hybrids in the volume, poems which are a mixture of the old style and the new. Though interesting to the student of Yeats as showing him in the actual process of transition, they have little value as poetry. The old manner and the

1) Our Irish Theatre, P. 28.
2) Jeffares, P. 126.
3) Yeats, W.B. Poems, Macmillan, London, 1926, P. 80.
4) ibid, P. 89.
5) Early Poems and Stories, P.P. 418 & 428.

new are altogether incompatible, and result in a broken, awkward structure when joined in the same poem. A good sample may be found in a few lines taken from "The Withering of the Boughs"; (1)

> I know where a dim moon drifts, where the Danaan kind
> Wind and unwind their dances when the light grows cool
> On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam gleams.
> No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
> The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

The greater number of the poems in the book, however, are in Yeats' new style, giving ample evidence that he is able to put his fresh theories into practice. Of these, the flawless short lyric 'The Arrow' and the longer 'Adam's Curse' are the most perfect. The former might be used to illustrate his changed approach to poetry;

> I thought of your beauty, and this arrow,
> Made out of a wild thought, is in my marrow.
> There's no man may look upon her, no man;
> As when newly grown to be a woman,
> Tall and noble but with face and bosom
> Delicate in colour as apple blossom.
> This beauty's kinder, yet for a reason
> I could weep that the old is out of season.(2)

The lines flow readily into one another, following the thought, which is itself expressed simply and clearly, without unnecessary ornament or elaboration. Yet it is the deceptive simplicity of conscious, deliberate artistry; the structure is skillfully moulded to the thought; the pauses, the shifts of idea and emphasis carefully planned; the words, those of everyday speech, selected and arranged in the one order which perfectly expresses the poet's feelings.

In 'Adam's Curse',(3) in addition to the bare, swift-moving style, we have traces of the introspective, retrospective thought that Yeats was beginning to make a part of the best of his poetry. There is not twilight beauty,

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1) Later Poems, P.P. 76-77.
2) ibid, P. 72.
3) ibid, P. 78.

no ecstatic vision or smothered passion here; only tranquil resignation jarred by an occasional note of quiet bitterness;

> For to articulate sweet sounds together
> Is to work harder than all these, and yet
> Be thought an idler by the noisy set
> Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
> The martyrs call the world. (1)

The misty, half-seen wisdom is gone, replaced by thought fully understood by the poet and communicated whole to the reader;

> ..."To be born woman is to know,—
> Although they do not talk of it at school---
> That we must labour to be beautiful". (2)

The piece ends on the note of weary acceptance that characterizes so many of the poems of this volume;

> I had a thought for no one's but your ears;
> That you were beautiful, and that I strove
> To love you in the old high way of love;
> That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
> As weary-hearted as that hollow moon. (3)

This use of the past tense when referring to his love for Maud recurs frequently, being found again in 'O Do Not Love Too Long'; (4)

> Sweetheart, do not love too long:
> I loved long and long,
> And grew to be out of fashion
> Like an old song.

He hints that it was this realization that she could never belong to him that led him to abandon the world of twilight and dream, a belief that, though an obvious oversimplification, probably has some truth in it;

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1) Later Poems, P. 78.
2) ibid, P. 79.
3) ibid.
4) ibid, P. 86.

> I have no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde...
> Nor Ulad, when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the wind;
> Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the heart,,.
> To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,
> Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne. (1)

Perhaps, he thinks, the reason she never loved him was because, he had revealed too much of himself to her; had made his passion too obvious;

> Never give all the heart, for love
> Will hardly seem worth thinking of
> To passionate women if it seem
> Certain, and they never dream
> That it fades out from kiss to kiss; (2)

Another thought oppressed him; Maud's beauty is beginning to fade. He himself was by this time in his late thirties, she but a year his junior.(3) No longer the girl she was once "When all the wild summer was in her gaze",(4) now her "hair has threads of grey,/"And little shadows come about her eyes". (5)

He would not admit that any physical change could make him love her less. "Time can but make her beauty over again". (6) Still, the poet in him mourns the fading of her glory:

> This beauty's kinder, yet for a reason
> I could weep that the old is out of season. (7)

He feels the weight of his own years pressing in on him too, and, as usual, exaggerates their pressure in the poem 'The Old Men Admiring Themselves In The Water'. (8)

Of the fourteen poems in the volume, ten have for theme this melancholy contemplation of a love and beauty that is fading into the past, producing a sense of depression more sustained and, because of its reality and sincerity, more oppressive than is found anywhere else in Yeats' verse.

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1) Later Poems, P.P. 83 ('Under the Moon').
2) ibid, P. 75 ('Never Give All the Heart').
3) Jeffares, P. 59; Thesis, P. 20.
4) Poems, P. 73 ('The Folly of Being Comforted).
5) ibid.
6) ibid.
7) ibid. P. 72.
8) ibid., P. 82.

The most significant of the four poems concerned with matters other than love and despair is "The Players Ask For A Blessing On the Psalteries and On Themselves", (1) which grew out of Yeats' efforts to teach his actors how to speak verse properly. The piece is important as the first sign of a willingness to introduce everyday things into his verse.

In another of the poems outside the common theme of the volume, 'In the Seven Woods', (2) he wishes, for a time, to forget the strife that is enveloping him, and rails, in a tone that is to become familiar a decade later in Responsibilities, at

> Tara uprooted, and new commonness
> Upon the throne and crying about the streets
> And Hanging its paper flowers from post to post,
> Because it is alone of all things happy. (3)

The poetry in this volume illustrates clearly Yeats in transition. The vague and beautiful, but outdated, romanticism gives way to a plain, disciplined verse form, a new concern with reality. It is poetry of realization and renunciation. As Hone observes; "although he describes an intangible world, all is now seen in the daylight of clear thought, without veiling twilight". (4) We can see "the abandonment of 'impersonal beauty', the desire to carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self into his poetry". (5) Yeats himself was satisfied with what he had accomplished; he never made any significant alterations in these poems. He later said of them; "This is the first book of mine that it is a pleasure to look at". (6)

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1) Later Poems, P. 87.
2) ibid. P. 71.
3) ibid
4) Hone, P. 197.
5) Daiches, David, Poetry and the Modern World University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1945, P.137.
6) Wade, Bibliography, P. 65.

D. 'The Old Age of Queen Maeve'

During the same year as he published In The Seven Woods, Yeats produced the long narrative poem 'The Old Age of Queen Maeve', (1) an allegorical work in which the half-legendary Queen of old Ireland represents Maud as she now appears to the poet.

> Though now in her old age, in her young age
> She had been beautiful in that old way
> That's all but gone.....
> She could have called over the rim of the world
> Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,
> And yet had been great bodied and great limbed,
> Fashioned to be the mother of strong children. (2)

The sense that Maud is old now, her beauty gone and power waning, pervades the piece. The aging queen, who had led her people in many battles, goes wearily to her room,

> Remembering that she too had seemed divine
> To many thousand eyes, and to her own
> One that the generations had long waited
> That work to difficult for mortal hands
> Might be accomplished. (3)

Later, when Maeve urges her people on to undermine Bual's hill, exulting in her own courage and strength when she stops their flight from the illusury monsters sent by an angry god, Yeats, who goes to unusual lengths to make his allegory clear here, breaks into the narrative to exclaim;

> Friend of these many years, you too had stood
> With equal courage in that whirling rout..... (4)

Beyond the parallels that I have illustrated, there is little of value in the poem, which belongs to that group of hybrids that the poet produced while still in the process of discarding his old style. There are traces of the bitterness that is to appear as a characteristic of his later poetry in such lines as;

1) Later Poems, P.P.49-58
2) ibid., P.P. 51-2.
3) ibid., P.P. 53-4
4) ibid. P. 56.

> ...for the proud heart is gone,
> And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all
> But soft beauty and indolent desire. (1)

But the piece as a whole belongs more to the twilight period than to the new style. Figures and symbols from Irish legend; the Sidhe, Fergus, Aengus, Caer, the white hound with one red ear, abound, while the diction is often drugged and elaborate;

> How may a mortal whose life gutters out
> Help them that wander with hand clasping hand,
> Their haughty images that cannot wither,
> For all their beauty's like a hollow dream,
> Mirrored streams that neither hail nor rain
> Nor the cold North has troubled? (2)

He works partly in the old, familiar dream world and partly in the new, real one where he is not as yet at ease. The original subject was a simple, if somewhat allegorical, retelling of an episode from the Maeve cycle. By turning continually to the present and to his own personal problems, however, he introduces a confusion into both structure and subject-matter that is never resolved, and which completely destroys the unity of the poem. It shows even more clearly than the lyrics of In the Seven Woods, the poet in the process of changing his style.

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1) Later Poems, P. 51.
2) ibid., P.P. 84-55.

CHAPTER 11

THEATRE BUSINESS

A. The Theatre; Incentive and Discipline

During the first decade of the new century, Yeats' interests lay almost entirely in the theatre, a medium that at this time provided a challenge worthy of any creative artist. Struggling to emerge from a mediocrity that stretched back almost unbroken to the early years of the seventeenth century, the Playhouse had been jolted out of its rut by Ibsen and Shaw, but the success of the 'new drama' was far from assured. No time could have been more apt for such a project as Yeats was to undertake.

The theatre, on the other hand, was suited ideally to the poet's own needs. Not only could he aid intellectual Ireland and art the world over, but from the stage he could also reach the common people with an art form that they might be able to understand and appreciate. In addition, he would be able, through experience and experiment, to develop and perfect his own dramatic theories. Finally, and this was perhaps the greatest single factor involved, he could find in the exacting yet prosaic business of theatre management a means of escape from the despair into which

he was plunged by the estrangement, and, eventually, marriage of Maud. We have seen already that her indifference was partially responsible for bringing him out of his world of dreams. Forced to face reality, he realized that he still had in himself too much of the dreamer and sought something solid to which to cling during this period of transition. Lyric poetry would not do. To begin with, most of his lyrics had been written to Maud, a subject now too painful to contemplate. Again, poetry, as he then conceived of it, had little to do with the harsher realities. Yet, he was incapable of setting his mind to anything that did not interest him. He required work with enough of the everyday about it to act as a discipline for his still rather extravagant fancy, but which retained sufficient scope for the imagination to exercise itself. The stage alone could satisfy all of these conditions. The creation of a National Theatre was a task that would require a mind filled with more than poetical impracticalities. The material and financial difficulties involved called for a sound business sense of the first order and a strict attention to trivial detail, Moreover, the task was of such magnitude as to consume the energies and full attention of every waking hour, leaving little place for any thoughts not immediately connected with the theatre.

In spite of all this, however, the imagination would not be stifled; merely disciplined. It would have its place in the project, and that place would be, as with Yeats it must always be, of the first importance. No matter how much common drudgery and business acumen is involved in a theatrical enterprise, nothing can be accomplished without good plays. As this was to be a National Theatre, the subject matter of the vast majority of the

plays it produced had to be Irish; as it was to be a repertory company, a steady supply of such plays would be required, particularly during the early years of its existence. Ireland had virtually no native dramatic tradition on which to draw, and so the needed plays had to be written. Thus Yeats' genius would be given ample opportunity to express itself, even if in a manner more restricted than that to which it was accustomed.

B. Yeats as Playwright.

As we have already seen, Yeats had always been interested in poetic drama. In fact, it was this form that his first attempts to produce poetry took when, in his teens, he had written "Play after Play". (1) He never altogether lost interest in this branch of art and by the end of the century had had three plays published and two actually produced.

These three pieces, already examined in some detail, were all written in the Eighteen-nineties manner. Less vague than his poetry of that period, they still suffer from indefiniteness and overelaboration, showing, in their original forms, lack of practical stage experience. The Countess Cathleen, (2) an allegory based on his troubled courtship of Maud, was written in 1892.(3) It has a loose plot, a good deal of unnecessary dialogue, and a contrived, fantastic ending that destroys any effect the first part of the play might have provided. The Land of Heart's Desire,(4) which had a successful run in London, (5) shows improvement in its form, the structure being more orderly and unified than that of its predecessor. The conflict between reality and the world of the fairies, is well handled and the ending credible. It is likely, however, that the London audience was more attracted by the play's

1) Autobiographies, P. 82.
2) Poems, 1895. P. 63.
3) Jeffares, P. 71.
4) Poems, p 92.
5) Jeffares, P. 95.

unusual subject matter and by the ephemeral beauty of its language than by any outstanding artistic merit that it might have possessed. Like The Shadowy Waters, Yeats' next play, it is more concerned with verbal beauty than with stage mechanics.

Yeats' plays were, necessarily, less personal than his lyric verse. Drama, even poetic drama, is far less capable of being a vehicle for personal expression, or even for the presentation of the ultimate truths arrived at through the expression of an individual's experience, than pure poetry. Yeats has probably managed to get as much of himself into his plays as any dramatist, but even in his case it is very often difficult to discover a great deal of what he was thinking or feeling at a given time through a study of his dramatic works. All that we can really do is to examine their mechanics and structure.

In common with the poetry, most of the plays written after the turn of the century are without the characteristic Eighteen-nineties diction, diffusion, and ornamentation. As we have seen, Yeats began the new century with a desire to write, as far as possible without sacrificing his individuality and artistic integrity, for the common people. He never seems to have been very comfortable doing so in lyric poetry, but in writing for the stage he was, he at first believed, obliged to cater to a certain extent to the demands of the average person. This fancy, a passing one, was carried to the extent of a compromise with his basic convictions in the first two plays that he turned out for the new theatre.

Both of these works were produced in October 1902. (1) The Pot of Broth (2) is a slight comic fragment, simply but skillfully constructed, the main significance of which is the striking advance in stage technique that it reveals. Like Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the other play written at the

1) Yeats, W. B., The Hour Glass and Other Plays, Macmillan, London, 1912, P.VLL.
2) ibid., P. 81.

same time, it is almost actor-proof, the perfect vehicle for a small, inexperienced company with few properties and less money. Both pieces are set in a single room, the main one of a typical Irish cottage; a setting which, considering the general poverty of the people, required few stage properties; both are short, one-act plays with, excepting the part of Cathleen, no very exacting roles.

Cathleen ni Houlihan (1) is, however, no mere comic fragment. It shows Yeats at the height of his desire to write for the common people, and is as effective a piece of Nationalist propaganda as ever took the stage in Ireland. Like so many of his ideas, the outline of the plot came to him in a dream; "One night I had a dream almost as distinct as a vision of a cottage where there was well-being and firelight and talk of a marriage, and into the midst of that cottage there came an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen ni Houlihan for whom so many songs have been made". (2) To this dream he added the inevitable conclusion, having the young man give up family and bride to follow the old woman. He could hardly have chosen a better theme to make his theatre popular. Written with precision and power, the role of Cathleen played magnificently by Maud Gonne, (3) the play was an immense success and long remained the most popular of his dramas.

Yeats had proven that he could write for a popular audience; now he began to write for himself once more. In March of 1903,(4) The Hour Glass (5) was performed. Expressing his contempt for the blindness of the 'wise men' of science and philosophy, it tells the story of a philosopher who convinced everyone of the folly of believing in anything that they could not see or

1) Yeats, W.B. The Unicorn from the Stars and Other Plays The Macmillan Co., New York, 1908, P. 139.
2) Yeats, W.B. Plays, Macmillan, London, 1926, P. 419.
3) Unicorn from the Stars etc., P. XL.
4) ibid
5) ibid., P. 169.

touch, only to be told by an angel that he had but an hour to live and that if he did not in that time find someone who believed he must suffer damnation. The Wise Man tries in vain to persuade his pupils, his wife, even his children that all that he has taught them is false. Finally, he turns to the Fool, who has claimed that he can see angels, and, in the first version of the play, receives salvation from him. This ending Yeats eventually came to see as too trite, with the result that in later editions of the play we have the Wise Man finding salvation within himself by being resigned to follow God's will; "I am content to know that God's will prevails whatever that may be...though that be our damnation. There is no other truth." (1) This latter version, in which man is shown as finding his salvation in and by himself without external help, is, doubtless, as Yeats remarked, "closer to my own thought".(2)

It is a very effective play. As Miss Una Ellis-Fermor writes in her excellent book The Irish Dramatic Movement;

> Many themes are woven together, the enmity of reason and mysticism, the wisdom of the fool putting down that of the wise man, and the reality of that other country which is masked by the actuality of this world. The conflict is symbolized by the two figures of the wise man who has put his trust in that reason which Blake abhorred, and the fool who, himself a nature mystic after the kind of Wordsworth, sees in the common earth about him bright shoots of everlastingness...The rejection of reason...is the beginning of this (The wise man's) conversion; utter renunciation of self, as in Peer Gynt, its climax. (3)

Here it is clear that Yeats is writing to please himself as well as his audience. All the more obscure undercurrents of thought would not be clear to them, but the moral fable that is the basic plot of the play would satisfy everyone, particularly in the original version, which was not changed till several years later, by which time Yeats had ceased to care what the

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1) Yeats, W. B. Plays, Macmillan, London, 1926, P.P. 59-60.
2) ibid., P. 422.
3) Ellis Fermor, Una, The Irish Dramatic Movement, Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, 1939, P.108.

general public thought.

Till now Yeats had been too concerned with attendance figures to risk producing poetic drama. By the latter part of 1903, however, he was sufficiently sure of his audience to begin experimenting, and in October (1) of that year produced his verse drama The King's Threshold.(2) Written "when our Society was beginning its fight for the recognition of pure art in a community of which one half is buried in the practical affairs of life, and the other half in politics and a propagandist patriotism", (3) it is a powerful defence of the rights and place in society of the artist; a place, Yeats believed, second only to that of the prince. The artist is personified in the poet Seanchan, who, when the play opens, is starving himself to death on the steps of the palace as a protest against the King's having denied the poets their hereditary place at his council table. Brought into conflict with every obstacle the poet must face in the world: authority, personified in its higher forms by the King, in its more petty by the Mayor; militarism and religion, portrayed by the Soldier and the Monk; self interest (the ladies of the court), filial duty, even love, as personified by Seanchan's betrothed, Fidelm, the poet emerges triumphant in death. Once he is dead, the King knows that the people will revolt and overthrow him for what he has done. Thus Yeats shows that he still has faith that the common people will in the end live up to the trust he places in their integrity; a faith that, like most he indulged in, proved misplaced.

He shows little faith in anyone or anything else, however. The play is in many ways a bitter one, its satire vicious and biting. The Mayor cries, "Long live the King! / "Because he does not take our heads from us".(4) When the princesses condescent to offer food to the dying poet their ladies-in-waiting simper; "They are so gracious; / "The dear little Princesses are so gracious". (5)

1) Plays, P. 423
2) ibid., P. 63.
3) ibid., P. 423
4) ibid., P. 84.
5) ibid., P. 98.

All, in fact, who are seen by Yeats as in any way opposed to the artist are attacked with straightforward, scathing violence, usually through the person of Seanchan. The Soldier, who reluctantly and rudely urges the poet to eat is scorned as the King's dog, cringing and taking its whippings and licking the hand which wields the rod. (1) The Monk, who has at least sufficient integrity to remain firm in his denunciation of Seanchan's actions, is portrayed as a stern, stubborn man who has no use for "one that hates obedience,/"Discipline, and orderliness of life", (2) yet who makes of his God a tame canary perched on the King's arm, obedient to his will.(3) The suave Chamberlain, the cultured,obliging diplomat who finds a corner in his life for art, but who considers other things just as important, is silenced when he claims that he can understand the poet's point of view by Seanchan's telling him that if this is so let him lie down and die too.(4) In short, Yeats condemns everyone who would deny to the artist his rightful heritage; "Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law"/"Who...thought it against their dignity"/"For a mere man of words to sit amongst them". (5) Such a place is "the poet's right",/"Established at the establishment of the world".(6) As Miss Ellis-Fermor writes; "This is no half-apologetic 'defence of poesy', no sweet and reasonable plea for its acceptance or deferential statement of its function. It is a flaming exaltation of that vision which is the symbol of all spiritual knowledge and the gift of the spirit beside which all other values are dissolved". (7)

Well constructed and fast-moving, almost bursting with power and indignation, the play was a success and convinced Yeats that poetic drama could be successfully produced on the modern stage. As was his habit, however, once he had brought to perfection one form,he experimented on another, further advanced one. He had a definite, though not yet wholly complete, theory as

1) Plays, P. 92.
2) ibid., P. 94.
3) ibid., 95.
4) ibid., P. 93.
5) ibid., P. 69
6) ibid.
7) The Irish Dramatic Movement, P.93.

to how drama should be written and presented, and was trying to 'educate' his audience, to prepare them, in slow stages, for his new conception of drama. He had succeeded in carrying them with him this far, but with his next play, On Baile's Strand, (1) he began to lose contact with them. All of the plays that he wrote after On the King's Threshold till the end of the decade show the influence of this advanced theory, which in them is carried as far as it could be brought before Ezra Pound introduced him to the Japanese Noh plays. It is this theory that we shall now examine in some detail.

C. Evolution of Yeats' Dramatic Theories.

As early as 1899 Yeats had written;

> The theatre of Art, when it comes to exist, must therefore discover grave and decorative gestures...and grave and decorative scenery...and dresses of so little irrelevant magnificence that the mortal actors and actresses may change without much labour into the immortal people of romance. The theatre began in ritual, and it cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty. (2)

There was never a time in his life when Yeats abandonned the belief that underlies this statement of his aims and which was expressed in the first poem in his first published volume of verse, where he said that "words alone are certain good". (3) Thus his plans for the theatre included more than a revival of interest in good drama; he sought to alter the form of the play itself to suit his own specifications. He would purge it of the commonplace; simplify and purify until everything was subordinated to the words. This basic theory, as we have seen, was formulated early; in the

1) Plays, P. 115.
2) Essays, P. 209 ('The Theatre').
3) Poems, 1895, P. 241.

first months of the existence of the Irish Literary Theatre. In his own plays he worked slowly towards its fulfillment.

"I would like to see poetical drama, which tries to keep at a distance from daily life that it may keep its emotion untroubled, staged with but two or three colors", (1) he writes in 1902, while Lady Gregory, writing of the same period, remarks that "Mr. Yeats had never ceased attacking the methods of the ordinary theatre, in gesture, in staging, and in the speaking of verse". (2) In 1903, in an essay entitled 'The Reform of the Theatre', he begins by saying, "I think the theatre must be reformed in its plays, its speaking, its acting, and its scenery. That is to say, I think there is nothing good about it at present".(3) First of all, he claims, "We have to write or find plays that will make the theatre a place of intellectual excitement---a place where the mind goes to be liberated".(4) It is the task of the playwright, he goes on, to do this, "But if we are to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon the stage...We must simplify acting, especially in poetical drama, and in prose drama that is remote from real life like my Hour Glass. We must get rid of everything that is restless, everything that draws the attention away from the sound of the voice". (5) Finally, he takes up the business of staging; "Just as it is necessary to simplify gesture that it may accompany speech without being its rival, it is necessary to simplify both the form and colour of scenery and costume". (6)

It was, however, many years before Yeats was able to embody all these features in his own plays, and when he finally did so in 1916, it was to create a form suitable for presentation only to a small, select drawing-room audience. His first plays were written, as we have seen, under the same

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1) Plays and Controversies, P. 22.
2) Our Irish Theatre, P. 29.
3) Plays and Controversies, P. 45.
4) ibid., P. 45.
5) ibid., P.P. 47-48.
6) ibid., P. 48.

influences that pervaded the poetry of his twilight period; influences hardly conducive to purity of diction or simplicity. The pieces produced immediately after the turn of the century were primarily concerned with attracting an audience to the new National Theatre. After The Pot of Broth and Cathleen ni Houlihan, however, he wrote The Hour Glass, a first, and, on the whole, successful attempt to introduce his theories to the theatre-goer. With its nameless, allegorical figures, exalted speech, and remote, indefinite setting it kept its distance from the audience, yet did not lose contact with them. The movements of the actors could, during most of the play, be unnaturally subdued and graceful, their voices something between speech and chant, without destroying the effect.

Following this successful experiment, Yeats became obsessed suddenly with the plight of the artist, his rightful place in, and present estrangement from, society, and wrote The King's Threshold and the confused, unsuccessful Where There Is Nothing. The former, with its symbolic figures and frequently lofty diction, makes some attempt to remain aloof from the spectator, but it is so full of power and genuine emotion that he is engulfed in it.

Following this temporary diversion, Yeats returned to his process of gradual simplification and purification in the three plays On Baile's Strand (1) Deirdre, (2), and The Green Helmet.(3) Of these, the first is the most successful from the point of view of his objectives. In it the figures are given their unreality by being so far removed from us in time--- a device that in Deirdre is offset by the tragic depth of the plot. The characters of On Baile's Strand, figures from Ireland's heroic past, appear as at once larger and less real than life and converse in epic dialogue. The Fool wears a mask (4) which eliminates the need for facial expression, thus further subordinating the actor to the words he is to speak. The plot is

1) Plays, 1926, P. 115.
2) ibid, P. 187.
3) ibid, P. 303.
4) ibid., P. 424.

simple and direct, all the violent action taking place offstage and narrated by eyewitnesses. Taken altogether, this play marks the closest to perfection that the poet was able, unaided, to bring his theories on drama.

Yeats the writer saw the dramatist as the dominant figure of the theatre, the actors being to him hardly more then machines for speaking his lines in the proper manner, their bodies instruments for bringing out more clearly, by their movements, the significance and beauty of these lines. Eventually, in his Plays for Dancers, he was to achieve this ideal, but by 1910 he is still working toward it. First, he must abandon altogether the idea of creating for the common people. It was not until the death of Synge, who, as we shall see, the poet saw as hounded to the grave by these very people, that Yeats was able to do this.

When the estrangement was complete and his theories brought to their ultimate expression in 1916 his playwriting activity diminished. It was a medium never altogether congenial to the poet; one into which he was driven as a means of escape and self-discipline. As soon as he thought that he had regained his equilibrium he severed his business connections with the Abbey and returned to his true field, lyric poetry. Though he continued to take an active interest in the affairs of the National Theatre and to produce one-act plays, some as great as anything seen in this century, till the year of his death, (1) the theatre became only an occasional diversion rather than a full-time occupation. For this we may be thankful. Altogether, it is difficult to disagree with Joseph Hone when he remarks that "the Abbey Theatre was never to him, as it was to others, an essential means to fame and achievement, and the time he gave to its battles...is a remarkable example of self-forgetfulness". (2)

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1) 'The Death of Cuchulain' is dated 1939, (Yeats, W. B., Collected Plays, Macmillan and Co., London, 1952, P.vi.)
2) Hone, P. 228.

CHAPTER THREE

LIFE AND THOUGHT 1903-1910

A. The Optimistic Years.

Yeats seldom wrote ~~little~~ lyric poetry during the years 1903-1910, and, as we have seen there is little of self-revelation in his plays. As a consequence, it is largely from his prose writings that we must draw our picture of his thoughts and feelings during these latter years of the transitional period.

In addition to his work in Ireland for the National Theatre, Yeats undertook in 1903 an American lecture tour to raise funds for the project.(1) Hone says of him as he appeared at this time; "He had the powerful lower lip which reveals the born orator...(and) a natural distinction of bearing, gravity of utterance...His voice was musical, touched with melancholy, the tones rising and falling in a continuous flow of sound".(2) In spite of the air of melancholy earnestness he cultivated for public use, however, he seems to have been in an enthusiastic temper at this time. To Lady Gregory

1) Hone, P. 205.
2) Hone, P. 213.

he writes; "Any fool can fight a winning battle, but it needs character to fight a losing one, and that should inspire us; which reminds me that I dreamed the other night that I was being hanged, but was the life and soul of the party" (1) The battle, moreover, did not as yet appear to be a losing one, and he is able to write to Florence Farr in October that, "The theatre is now a success, if it goes on as it is now we are though with all our troubles". (2)

Yeats had good reason to be optimistic. On a visit to England the group of amateur players with their unusual,(3) impressive new plays had been received enthusiastically by both public and critics. As a direct result of this triumph, they were provided with a theatre of their own by Miss Horniman,(4) a moderately wealthy, artistically inclined Englishwoman who, in the portrait by J. B. Yeats, (5) wears the look of harrassed bewilderment that from that time forward became her usual facial expression.

Meanwhile the poet, in what spare time he could accumulate, continued to immerse himself in continental literature and began to have some doubts as to whether he was doing the right thing in so completely estranging himself from the world of the imagination. "I have read hardly any books this summer but Cervantes and Boccaccio and some Greek plays", he writes in 1904;

> I have felt that these men, divided from one another by so many hundreds of years, had the same mind. It is we who are different; and then the thought would come to me, that has come to me so often before, that they lived at times when the imagination turned to life itself for excitement. The world was not changing quickly about them. There was nothing to draw their imaginations from the ripening of the fields, from the birth and death of their children, from the destiny of their souls....when they wrote it was out of their own rich experience....We lose freedom more and more as we get away from ourselves.(6)

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1) Our Irish Theatre, P. 48.
2) Bax, Clifford, ed., Letters; Florence Farr, Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats, P. 148.
3) Jeffares, P. 145.
4) ibid.
5)ibid., P. 156.
6) Plays and Controversies, P.P. 96-98.

As ever, he believed in the immortality of the spirit, and though he could not at this time practice the formula that egery man must ultimately find himself in himself, wrote that "in the end the creative energy of men depends upon their believing that they have, within themselves, something immortal and imperishable, and that all else is but as an image in a looking glass". (1)

His new ideas about poetry, over which he seems to have hesitated at first, though he never admitted it in print, had now become firm convictions. In October of 1905 he writes to Florence Farr that;

> I have been speaking here (in Dublin) lately. I at least find that I can move people by power not merely---as the phrase is---by 'charm' or 'speaking beautifully'---a thing I always resented. I feel this change in all my work and that it has brought a change into the personal relations of life---even things seemingly beyond control answer strangely to what is within. I once cared only for images about whose necks I could cast various 'chains of office' as it were. They were so many aldermen of the ideal, whom I wished to master the city of the soul. Now I do not want images at all, or chains of office being contented with the unruly soul.(2)

In 1906 Yeats wrote a remarkable essay of self-revelation called, aptly enough, 'Discoveries'.(3) From it we get an unusually clear picture of the poet's state of mind immediately before the bitter disillusionment that followed the riots over Synge's Playboy of the Western World.

Here, for the last time, he expresses his belief that the people, if good work is set before them, will appreciate that work;

> My work in Ireland has continually set this thought before me; 'How can I make my work mean something to vigorous and simple men whose attention is not given to art but to a shop, or teaching in a National School, or dispensing medicine?' I had not wanted to 'elevate them' or 'educate them', as these words are understood, but to make them understand my vision, and I had not wanted a large audience,...but enough people for what is accidental and temporary to lose itself in the lump....I have always come to this certainty; what moves natural men in the arts is what moves them in life.(4)

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1) Plays and Controversies, P.P.99-100
2) Letters, P.55.
3) Essays, P.P. 323-68.
4/ ibid., P.328.

He sees clearly that there are "Two ways before literature---'upward into ever-growing subtlety...or downward, taking the soul with us until all is simplified and solidified again".(1) It is the choice of choices; "the way of the bird until common eyes have lost us, or to the market carts; but we must see to it that the soul goes with us".(2) As yet he is obviously undecided as to which way is to be his. He tends still to follow the market carts, but ever at a greater distance. Not yet quite ready to admit that he must soar with the birds above all common things, he is nevertheless beginning to feel that this might well be his course; "If the carts have hit our fancy we must have the soul tight within our bodies....If it begin to slip away we must go after it".(3) In either case anything is preferable to "the machine shop of the realists". (4)

Once a new point of view had engaged Yeats' attention, he tended to see it as the only one possible; to reject as inadequate anything done under a different inspiration. As a result, now that he had finally decided that his new approach to poetry was the correct one his early work became abhorrent to him:

> Without knowing it, I had come to care for nothing but impersonal beauty. I had set out on life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry, and had understood this as a representation of my own visions and an attempt to cut away the non-essential, but as I imagined the visions outside myself my mind became full of decorative landscape and of still life. I thought of myself as something unmoving and silent living in the middle of my own mind and body....Then one day I understood quite suddenly, as the way is, that I was seeking something unchanging and unmixed and always outside myself,...The more I tried to make my art deliberately beautiful, the more did I follow the opposite of myself....Presently I found that I entered into myself and pictured myself and not some essence when I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten the mind of some burden of love or bitterness thrown upon it by the events of life...we should ascend out of common interests, the thoughts of the newspapers, of the market place, of men of science, but only so far as we can carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole.(5)

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1) Essays, P. 330.
2) ibid.
3) ibid., P. 331.
4) ibid.
5) ibid., P.P. 336-7.

He realizes that the artist cannot travel the same road twice, that to survive he must be constantly remaking himself. His old life and the style born of that life are past; he must find new things to express as well as a new mode of expression. He seems even to foresee the direction in which he must eventually move; "The mind can never do the same thing twice over, and having lost simple beauty and meaning, it passes to the strange and hidden, and at last must find its delight---having outrun its harmonies---in the emphatic and discordant". (1)

B. Disillusionment and the Death of Synge.

In 1907 occurred two events which struck to the roots of Yeats' faith in the Irish people. In January, Synge's new play The Playboy of the Western World was produced. (2) When first it had been presented to the directors of the theatre, Lady Gregory writes, "We were almost bewildered by its abundance and fantasy, but we felt, and Mr. Yeats said very plainly, that there was far too much 'bad language'". (3) Synge agreed, and most of the objectionable terms were removed from the script. At the first performance, however, the audience broke up in disorder at the word 'shift' and every night for a week afterward the house was in an uproar. (4) Yeats had a high regard for Synge than for any other dramatist of the time (5) and the abuse heaped on the reticent young man hurt and angered him. When, later the same year, John O'Leary died, (6) it seemed indeed that 'Romantic Ireland' was 'dead and gone'(7). The old patriot's death served to emphasize, almost to symbolize, the passing of that Ireland to which the poet had devoted himself, and when recalling O'Leary in an essay written that year, he speaks of "that ideal Ireland, perhaps from this out an imaginary Ireland, in whose service I labour".(8)

1) Essays, P. 358.
2) Jeffares, P. 155.
3) Our Irish Theatre, P.133.
4) Jeffares, P.155
5) Of Shaw he wrote to Florence Farr (Letters, PP.59-60) "Ah, if he had but style and distinction and was not such a barbarian of the barricades".
6) Hone, P.
7) Yeats, W.B., Collected Poems, Macmillan and Co., London, 1952, P.121.
8) Essays, P.304; Poetry and Tradition.'

In the same essay he begins to speak bitterly of his old dreams for his country;

> We were to forge in Ireland a new sword on our old traditional anvil for that great battle that must in the end reestablish the old, confident, joyous world. All the while I worked with this idea, founding societies that became quickly or slowly everything I despised, one part of me looked on, mischievous and mocking, and the other part spoke words which were more and more unreal...(1)

The faith that he had placed in the middle classes; the workers, clerks, and shopkeepers, even the year before is gone. Only those at the extreme poles of life, he now believes, are capable of producing or appreciating beauty. His growing fondness for the aristocracy begins to emerge more clearly. They, the leisured class, are, with the poet and peasant, the creators of all beauty.

> Three types of men have made all beautiful things. Aristocracies have made beautiful manners, because their place in the world puts them above the fear of life, and the countrymen have made beautiful stories and beliefs, because they have nothing to lose and so do not fear, and the artists have made all the rest, because Providence has filled them with recklessness. All these look backward to a long tradition, for, being without fear, they have held to whatever pleased them. The others being always anxious have....little belief that anything can be an end in itself....At all times they fear and even hate the things that have worth in themselves,,..It seems to them, that those who have been freed by position, by poverty, or by traditions of Art, have something terrible about them.(2)

It is these people, Yeats believes, who have come to dominate Ireland;

> Power passed to small shopkeepers, to clerks, to that very class who had seemed to John O'Leary so ready to bend to the power of others, to men who had risen above the traditions of the countryman, without learning those of cultivated life or even educating themselves....Immediate victory, immediate utility, became everything, and the conviction...that life is greater than the cause, withered, and we artists...became as elsewhere in Europe protesting individual voices. Ireland's great moment had passed".(3)

1) Essays, P.P. 308.
2) ibid., P.P.310-11.
3) ibid., P.P. 321-22.

In spite of his conviction that Ireland was going to the dogs, Yeats continued to labour at the Abbey, no longer with any real belief that it might accomplish the aims for which it had been founded, but more than anything else as a form of self-discipline. In the journal that he began in 1908 as an aid toward a better understanding of himself,(1) he writes; "I cry continually against my life. I have sleepless nights thinking of the time that I must take from poetry...and yet, perhaps, I must do all these things that I may set myself into a life of action".(2) Only twice during his life did Yeats publish sections of his personal diary, thereby indicating that he considered the period and events covered by the excerpts to be of unusual significance in his developement. The selections that concern this period, published in 1936, (3) belong almost entirely to the year 1909. In them he shows, as we have seen, that his only reason for staying on as business manager at the Abbey was for the purpose of disciplining the powerful but disorganized energies of his youth. "Youth", he writes, "is always giving itself, expending itself. It is only after years that we begin the supreme work, the adapting of our energies to a chosen end, the disciplining of ourselves".(4) That youth is long past, however; might not the discipline by now be nearly accomplished ~~by now~~; might not its continuance be a mistake, an unnecessary crippling of his natural genius? "Am I going against nature in my constant attempt to fill my life with work? Is my mind as rich as in idle days? Is not perhaps the poet's labour a mere rejection? If he seeks purity---the ridding of his life of all but poetry---will not inspiration come? Can one reach God by toil?"(5)

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1) Hone, P. 241.
2) Yeats, W.B., Dramatis Personae, Macmillan and Co.,London, 1936, P.109.
3) see (2) above.
4) Dramatis Personae, P. 99.
5) Jeffares, P. 159.

Unable to bring himself to a decision, his next move was precipitated by the death of Synge. It is difficult to overestimate the regard that Yeats had for the younger man as an artist, and the admiration he had for him as a person. Synge's reticence, combined with a solitary, independent nature, had prevented the pair from ever being intimates; yet while he was still alive he was credited by Yeats with being primarily responsible for most of what the Irish dramatic movement had accomplished; "it was only the coming of the unclassifiable, uncontrollable, capricious uncompromising genius of J. M. Synge that altered the direction of the movement and made it individual, critical, and combative".(1)

Yeats' admiration for his fellow dramatist doubtless had much to do with the fact that in many ways Synge was the epitome of all that he admired in others and yet could never be himself. Solitary and self-sufficient by nature, quiet and removed, yet never moody, Synge kept his thoughts and opinions to himself, mixing little and never saying a word more than was necessary. Yeats, on the other hand, thought of himself as garrulous, theatrically emotional, opinionated, and quite lacking in dignity. Moreover, the younger dramatist had a power that the poet coveted but never himself possessed. He could get close to the country people, could understand them, their life and their language, and could recreate this life and language on the stage. Far from envying him his gift, Yeats idolized him for it. The entries in his diary on and near the date of Synge's death are by far the most moving in all his prose. When the playwright died of cancer on March 9, 1909 he "became for Yeats one of the heroic figures of literature".(2)

Synge's death completed the poet's estrangement from the Irish middle classes. "The soul of Ireland has become a vapour", he writes, "and her body a stone".(3)

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1) Yeats, W. B., The Unicorn From the Stars and Other Plays, Macmillan, New York, 1908, Introduction, P. vk.

2) Hone, P. 244.

3) Dramatis Personae, P. 106.

He saw the "hatred, envy, jealousy, revenge"(1) of those who had attacked The Playboy of the Western World as having driven the sensitive Synge to his grave, and for this he could never forgive them, From them he turned, with his usual capacity for embracing passing things, to the landed aristocracy, who had had time and leisure to acquire, cultivate, and appreciate beauty and culture;

> Ireland has grown sterile, because power has passed to men who lack the training which requires a certain amount of wealth to ensure continuity from generation to generation, and to free the mind in part from other tasks. A gentleman is a man whose principal ideas are not connected with his personal needs and his personal success....Culture is the sanctity of the intellect.(2)

Though he continued to act as a director and to exert considerable influence, he severed his connection with the business end of the Abbey shortly after Synge's death,(3) handing the management of the theatre over to Lennox Robinson, a promising young dramatist with no practical experience whatever, in a gesture at once characteristic and calculatedly dramatic. Robinson recalls how "Yeats when he arrived broke almost without preamble into a speech obviously already agreed on and perhaps rehearsed"(4) in which he made him manager of the Abbey because, "the Norwegian Theatre at Bergen, recognizing Ibsen's genius, had attached him to that theatre at the age of twenty-three".(5)

His theatre duties at an end, Yeats turned back once more, almost hesitantly to lyric poetry, writing in his diary; "I often wonder if my talent will ever recover from the heterogeneous labour of these last few years".(6)

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1) Dramatis Personae, P. 107.
2) ibid.
3) Henn, P. 301.
4) Robinson, Lennox, Curtain Up P. 23.
5) ibid.
6) Dramatis Personae, P. 102.

C. The Green Helmet and Other Poems.

The meagre poetic output of the seven preceding years appeared in 1910 (1) in a volume entitled The Green Helmet and Other Poems.(2) Containing, besides the play from which it takes its name, only twenty-one brief lyrics, many of them no more than epigrammatic fragments, it shows more than anything else how far Yeats had strayed from the path of poetry during his years of struggle and disappointment in the theatre.

All of the poems, with the possible exception of the first, an elegy on death called 'His Dream',(3) are written in this new style. In the attempt to find and express reality he has by now abandonned altogether the world of shadow and dream. The search is, however, a difficult one, and though he is generally successful in maintaining a high level of excellence in form, the subject matter of the pieces is scattered and uneven. Reality is faced, but it is not yet ordered, or, in a more than fragmentary way, understood. As Stephen Spender writes; "The inspiration of Yeats's best poetry is mostly occasional, but here the poems seem to have an altogether occasional nature, in the sense that they form the background to various activities which engaged Yeats at the time".(4)

As most critical appraisals of the poet tend to be, this statement is rather too general, for though it applies to perhaps the greater number of poems in the volume, it leaves out of consideration those concerned with Maud. Though there is, as usual, little mention of her in his prose during these years, she still held a prominent place in his thoughts and almost half of the verses, ten, deal in one way or another with her.

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1) Wade, Bibliography, P. 94.
2) Yeats, W. B., Later Poems, Macmillan and Co., London, 1925, P.P.149-70.
3) Later Poems, P. 149.
4) Permanence of Yeats, P. 182.

All the pieces were written after Maud's marriage, however, with the result that there is little in them of the old passion, and nothing of hope. Rather, they view her in retrospect, recalling what she was, trying, with a semblance of calm, to understand why she is what she is, why she has done what she has. No longer a lofty poetic ideal, she is become a woman, once beautiful, who, like himself, is growing old:

> Ah, that Time could touch a form
> That could show what Homer's age
> Bred to be a hero's wage. (1)

With the passing of her beauty, the heat of his passion, which was after all, excited by little more than that outward perfection of form, is also past:

> It was the mask engaged your mind,
> And after set your heart to beat,
> Not what's behind. (2)

The gentling hand of time has not only cooled his fever, it has also settled her own wild spirit:

> Ah, but peace that comes at length,
> Came when Time had touched her form. (3)

Now that both are no longer young, he rejoices that he has been able to capture and preserve for posterity at least a part of the glory that was hers:

> And now, being grey,
> I dream that I have brought
> To such a pitch my thought
> That coming time can say,
> 'He shadowed in a glass
> What thing her beauty was'. (4)

Nor does he blame her longer for all the pain she has brought him. Being what she is, she could not have done otherwise:

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1) Later Poems, P. 154, 'Peace'
2) ibid., P. 162, 'The Mask'.
3) ibid., P. 155.
4) ibid., 'A Woman Homer Sung'.

Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,

Why, what could she have done, being what she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn? (1)

And, when all was said, were not the best things that he had written done but to try to make her understand, to win the love she was unable to give? Was his greatest poetry up to this time anything more than a continuous attempt to find a means of communication with the soul he felt certain must exist beneath her beauty? If she had understood, if she had returned his love, might he not, perhaps, "have thrown poor words away And been content to live"? (2)

At times he intrudes into the poetry inspired by the memory of Maud the other themes that run through this volume. In the same piece as the above quotation, 'The Consolation', he speaks of Ireland as "this blind, bitter land", (3) and in 'Against Unworthy Praise' rebukes himself for caring what this nation of fools thinks of work which, after all, was but done for a woman's sake;

O heart, be at peace, because
Nor knave nor dolt can break
What's not for their applause,
Being but for a woman's sake.(4)

This bitterness, growing out of his disappointment with the Irish, appears as a dominant theme in the book. It strikes through 'These Are the Clouds',(5) and 'At the Abbey Theatre', (6) in the latter of which he asks if there is any way to please the crowd;

Is there a bridle for this Proteus
That turns and changes like his draughty seas?
Or is there none, most popular of men,
But when they mock us that we mock again?

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1) Later Poems, P. 152, 'No Second Troy'
2) ibid., P. 151.
3) ibid.
4) ibid., P. 156.
5) ibid., P. 165.
6) ibid., P. 164.

In 'At the Galway Races' (1) his attack is aimed more specifically at the middle classes.

> We, too, had good attendance once,
> Hearers and hearteners of the work;
> Aye, horsemen for companions,
> Before the merchant and the clerk
> Breathed on the work with timid breath.

These poems, like many in the volume, are concerned with contemporary issues and the affairs of everyday life, revealing Yeats increasing willingness to make such things the subject matter of his poetry. Ranging over the whole field of his interests, he attacks with the vicious sarcasm that is to mark much of his later poetry the university students who have joined the campaign against immoral literature,(2) as well as 'A Poet, Who Would Have Me Praise Certain Bad Poets, Imitators of Mine and His'(3)

> You say, as I have often given tongue
> In praise of what another's said or sung,
> 'Twere politic to do the like by these;
> But was there ever dog that praised his fleas?

His growing sympathy with the aristocracy is apparent in 'Upon a House Shaken By the Land Agitation';(4)

> Although
> Mean roof-trees were the sturdier for its fall,
> How should their luck run high enough to reach
> The gifts that govern men, and after these
> To gradual Time's last gift, a written speech
> Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease?

The labor that has taken him away from his poetry is also much in his thoughts, and he laments the fact that "All things can tempt me from this craft of verse".(5) However, though for a long time now

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1) Later Poems, P. 161.
2) ibid., P. 160 'On Hearing That Students of Our New University Have Joined the Agitation against Immoral Literature'.
3) ibid., P. 167.
4) ibid., P. 163.
5) ibid., P. 168.
6) ibid., P. 157.

> The fascination of what's difficult
> Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
> Spontaneous joy and natural content
> Out of my heart....(1)

he is ~~now~~ about to rebel;

> ...My curses on plays
> That have to be set up in fifty ways,
> On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
> Theatre business, management of men.
> I swear before the dawn comes round again
> I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt. (2)

The theatre has served its purpose; the luxuriant ecstasy of his youth has been tamed and channelled. With time, he believes, has come wisdom;

> Though leaves are many, the root is one;
> Through all the lying days of my youth
> I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
> Now I may wither into the truth. (2)

The poetry of this volume reveals, more especially in style, but in content as well, Yeats' increasing mastery of the new instrument he has fashioned. That the critics have realiazed this fact may be seen in the unusually close attention they have given to the book. Perhaps the best summary of it is given by Dr. Jeffares;

> The poems of The Green Helmet,...were written by a disillusioned but by no means despairing Yeats. They are far from the languor and resignation, the nostalgia and deliberate restriction of his earlier poetry, but they lack the full intellectual and rhetorical content which was to give his succeeding poetry its peculiar power. His ideals of love and patriotism were not yet replaced; he was like a child who looks at its bricks before beginning to integrate them in a new and real structure which will not live merely in his imagination. (3)

Yeats had forged his new instrument, and now, his business connections with the Abbey severed, was ready to begin using it in earnest. Maud and

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1) Later Poems, P. 157. 'The Fascination of What's Difficult'
2) ibid., P. 159 'The Coming of Wisdom with Time'
3) Jeffares; P. 142 ~~(?82)?~~

his hopes for an ideal Ireland had faded from the foreground; he had only himself to work for. The period of transition was drawing to a close, and by the time he published '<u>Responsibilities</u>' in 1914 he had all but completed his task of remaking himself.

CRITICISMS ON THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

The critics have, on the whole, treated this period with far more thoroughness and understanding than they did the first phase of Yeats' poetic career. There can be little dispute with D. S. Savage when he states that; "The cause of this change of mood, subject-matter and style lay in Yeats's disatisfaction with a poetry of dreams which reflected his disatisfaction with dreams themselves", (1) or with John Gassner when he claims; "The theatre interested him not as a forum or platform but as a temple for mystic beauty and an auditorium for spoken poetry".(2) Arthur Mizener, too, is close to the truth when he remarks that;

> What happened to make Yeats's later poetry different from his early poetry was that he came to feel the early poetry unsatisfactory, not because its theme was unsatisfactory, but because its manner of realizing its theme was. He wanted not only to present his theme but to present it in terms of the 'real' world; he wanted his poems to be true not only to the dreams where his responsibility began but also to the facts.(3)

Edmund Wilson, in his usual exuberant manner, also presents considerably more than surface criticism when he writes;

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1) Permanence of Yeats, P. 204.
2) Gassner, John, Makers of the Drama, Dover Publications, New York, 1940, P.544.
3) Permanence of Yeats, P. 142.

> ...he still champions, he still puts above everything, the nobility and splendor of the imagination; but he must face life's hard conditions....He would reduce his verse to something definite and hard---at the same time more severe and more passionate..... he would be less prodigal now of symbols and names, and his visions have a new austerity....more and more steadily he fixes his attention on the actual world about him....He finds his subjects now in the events of his own life, no longer transposed into romantic convention, and in the public affairs of Ireland.(1)

During these years Yeats, as David Daiches puts it;

> ...repudiated the view that there is an 'inevitable distinction between the poet as a man, as a 'doing and suffering' human being, and the poet as a creator of 'beauty'. The poet as creator gives form to his experiences as man.(2).

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1) Permanence of Yeats, P.P. 21-23.
2) Daiches, David, Poetry and The Modern World, University of Chicago, Press, Chicago, 1945, P. 158.

SECTION IV

EMERGENCE INTO MATURITY

CHAPTER 1

1914

A. Activities

Between the time in 1910 when he severed his business connections with the Abbey and 1914, when he published Responsibilities, Yeat's life was relatively uneventful, his time and energies being devoted largely to lyric poetry. In 1910 his financial difficulties were resolved when he was put on the Civil List, (1) and the next year he travelled with the Abbey players to America.(2) Returning to Ireland, he wrote a verse-drama translation of Oedipus Rex (3) and met his future wife, Miss Georgie Hyde-Lees.(4) He frequently journeyed to Normandy to visit Maud, long separated from her husband, but these sojourns merely "added to his bitterness and disillusion due to recurrent memories of his ideal love".(5)

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1) Hone, P. 266.
2) ibid., P. 271
3) ibid., P.P. 273-4.
4) ibid., P. 276.
5) Jeffares, P. 165.

A striking, if rather highly colored, picture of the poet as he appeared at this time is given by Dame Edith Lyttelton, who describes him as having eyes,

> "...burning with vehemence, smouldering with a deeper emotion than he was expressing, and finally a general sense that he did not belong to the life of London or of England, or indeed perhaps to the life of the Earth itself...I remember wondering if he would lead a revolt and be killed at a street barricade and only gradually I realized that his fight was not against anyone or anything except in defense of what he conceived as Beauty and Spirit"(1)

In the winter of 1913 he took lodgings with the expatriate American poet Ezra Pound, whom he described to Lady Gregory(2) as "a learned companion and a pleasant one...He is full of the Middle Ages and helps me to get back to the definite and concrete".(3) Pound was not the sort of man with whom one lived without undergoing some change, and Jeffares is not exaggerating when he remarks that his effect on Yeats' poetry "was to make it harsher and more outspoken".(4)

Meanwhile, replying to a letter from his father which rebuked him for abandonning his earlier style, Yeats wrote;

> ...of recent years instead of vision, meaning by vision the intense realization of ecstatic emotion symbolized in a definite imagined region, I have tried for more self-portraiture, I have tried to make my work convincing with a speech so natural that the hearer would feel the presence of a man thinking and feeling.(5)

Showing how well he had achieved this goal, he published next May the volume Responsibilities.(6)

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1) Hone, P.P. 277-78.
2) ibid., P. 290.
3) ibid.,
4) Jeffares, P. 177.
5) Hone, P. 288.
6) Later Poems, P.P. 172-234.

B. Responsibilities.

In this volume, which contains the comparatively large poetic output of the previous four years, we see Yeats emerging from the period of transition in full command of his new powers. Though the book has been the object of exhaustive, and on the whole not inept, criticism, it will nevertheless be necessary to study it in some detail as showing the culmination, though not the final perfection, of Yeats' development.

Two quotations precede the body of the work.(1) The first, "In dreams begins responsibility", is a defence of all that he has done up till this time as but a preparation, a period of apprenticeship; while the second, taken from the Chinese, undoubtedly refers to his long estrangement from poetry; "How am I fallen from myself, for a long time now/"I have not seen the Prince of Chang in my dreams".

The volume is prefaced by what T. S. Eliot has called, "That violent and terrible epistle dedicatory...where is first fully evinced Yeats' power of speaking as a particular man to men".(2) In it, apart from the power of its presentation, is primarily revealed the beginnings of an ancestor worship that was to take a prominent place in Yeats' later poetry. He asks his forebears,

> Traders or soldier who have left me blood
> That has not passed through any huxter's loin,(3)

to pardon him that,

> ...for a barren passion's sake,
> Though I have come close on forty-nine
> I have no child, I have nothing but a book,
> Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.(4)

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1) Later Poems, P. 173.
2) Hone, P. 294.
3) Later Poems, P. 175.
4) ibid.

There is nothing particularly significant in the realization that his has been a barren passion; he has been aware of this for some time. What is new is ~~that he~~ his face this fact; the straightforward admission and renunciation of it born largely of a desire for children to carry on his line. A natural outgrowth of his increasing family pride, it is an ambition seen again behind the frenzied, passion-ridden lines of the poem 'Beggar to Beggar Cried',(1) in which, employing the mask of the two beggars to represent two conflicting sides of his nature, he suggests to himself, rather frantically, that it may be about time to;

> ...get a comfortable wife and house
> To rid me of the devil in my shoes,
> .....
> And the worse devil that is between my thighs.(2)

Here we also find the first evidence of the rather shocking sensuality that in his old age was almost to engulf the poet, and which appears again in this volume in the piece 'On Those Who Hated The Playboy of the Western World', (3) and, most vividly, in 'The Witch';(4)

> Toil and grow rich,
> What's that but to lie
> With a foul witch (5)
> And after, drained dry,
> To be brought
> To the chamber where
> Lies one long sought
> With despair.

Yeats' practice of exalting in verse those who had played a part in his development did not stop with his family. In 'Friends' (6) he recalls and praises the three women who have most influenced him:(7) Diana Vernon, who for fifteen years has let no thought or care come between "Mind and delighted mind";(8)

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1) Later Poems, P. 208.
2) ibid.
3) ibid., P. 202.
4) ibid., P. 219.
5) Jeffares, P. 175 (this line originally read 'with a stale bitch')
6) Later Poems, P. 226.
7) Jeffares, P. 175.
8) Later Poems, P. 226.

Lady Gregory, whose hands unbound "youth's dreaming load" and "So changed me that I live/ "Labouring in ecstasy";(1) and Maud, at the thought of whom, "So great a sweetness flows/ "I shake from head to foot",(2) even though she took "All till my youth was gone"/ With scarce a pitying look".(3)

In "The Grey Rock' (4) it is his tragic contemporaries of the nineties that he recalls;

> Poets with whom I learned my trade,
> Companions of the Cheshire Cheese,(5)

He blends his reminiscences of that past time with the old Irish legend of Aoife and the young warrior she loved, but who put off the cloak of invisibility she gave him to die fighting beside his friends. A group of his old friends in a London tavern are superimposed on the company of old gods, drinking and feasting at Slievenamon when Aoife comes and urges them to hunt her dead lover's corpse through the earth. Returning to the near past, Yeats identifies her with Maud urging him to fight for an Ireland already dead, saying,

> I knew a woman none could please
> Because she dreamed when but a child
> Of men and women made like these; (6)

Then he turns again to the memory of his friends; men who

> ...never made a poorer song
> That you might have a heavier purse,
> Nor gave loud service to a cause
> That you might have a troop of friends.(7)

By doing so, he continues with an undertone of bitterness, they earned the right,

> To troop with those the world's forgot,
> And copy their proud steady gaze.(8)

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1) Later Poems, P. 226.
2) ibid., P. 227.
3) ibid., P. 226.
4) ibid., P.P. 177-81.
5) ibid., P. 177.
6) ibid., P. 178.
7) ibid., P. 179.
8) ibid.

When Aoife asks;

> Why should the faithfullest heart most love
> The bitter sweetness of false faces?
> Why must the lasting love what passes? (1)

it is Yeats' final cry against the portion life has dealt him. At once the gods drench her with the wine of forgetfulness and she rises laughing, thus symbolizing what is perhaps the dominant theme of the volume; Yeats' determination to forget the bitter past and seek what joy he can find in the future. Turning in conclusion to the ghosts of his old comrades, he can face them and say, "I have kept my faith, though faith was tried," (2)

The poem is one of the most significant in Responsibilities. Written, as David Daiches observes, "partly in that familiar strain which is coming to be so frequent in Yeats's poetry at this time, and partly in his older mythological manner", it "presents a curious combination of illustrative myth and autobiographical realism which we find again and again in later volumes".(3)

Even in this volume, the device of using episodes from the old myths to illustrate contemporary situations is more than onne evident. 'The Three Beggars' (4) uses to criticize the current state of affairs in Ireland, the story of King Guaire 's promise of a thousand pounds to whichever of three beggars can get to sleep first within a set time. The beggars, representing the Irish people, quarrel among themselves till the time limit is exhausted, then, when it is too late to do them any good, fall asleep. Meanwhile, representing the poet, a lone crane who has been seeking nourishment among the reeds but has been disturbed by their dispute ponders that now perhaps he shall be able to find a trout, a fish used here as symbol of beauty and wisdom.

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1) Later Poems, P. 181.
2) ibid.
3) Daiches, David, Poetry and the Modern World, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 19 , P. 163.
4) Later Poems, P. 203.
5) Henn, P. 91.

Though the attack on the Irish is subdued in this piece, it is one of the main themes of the book, emerging clearly in various other poems. Yeats had not yet forgiven them for what they ~~did~~ had done to Synge, and he strikes out viciously in the fragment '<u>On Those That Hated The Playboy of the Western World</u>'; (1)

> Once, when midnight smote the air,
> Eunuchs ran through Hell and met
> On every crowded street to stare
> Upon great Juan riding by:
> Even like these to rail and sweat
> Staring upon his sinewy thigh.

If possible, his opinion of the Irish people was further lowered when Hugh Lane offered his magnificant collection of modern art to the city of Dublin on condition that a suitable building be erected to house them. The plans for the new building found no popular support, with the result that the paintings went to the London National Gallery.(2) This controversy inspired the poem 'To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery If It Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures'(3) (Yeats was always fond of giving long titles to short poems), in which he speaks of Dublin as "the blind and ignorant town";(4) and 'To a Shade'(5), in which he compares Lane's treatment to that given Parnell, both men having been driven out by the very people that they were trying to help. In the former piece may also be seen the wide knowledge of Italian history which is a prominent feature of his later poetry. The second poem, on the other hand, ie enlivened by flashes of the sarcastic wit that ~~it~~ is beginning to appear in his verse. Thinking of the ghost of Parnell standing beside his monument, he asks "I wonder if the builder has been paid".(6) The dominant mood, however is one of angry bitterness, a bitterness that reaches its

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1) <u>Later Poems</u>, P. 202.
2) Jeffares, P. 170.
3) <u>Later Poems</u>, P. 193.
4) ibid.
5) ibid., P. 199.
6) ibid.

~~its~~ climax in 'September 1913'(1), in which we find what Hone calls "the same mingling of the heroic and the epigrammatic satire....which Catholic and Nationalist Ireland have found it hard to forgive";(2)

> What need you, being come to sense,
> But fumble in a greasy till
> And add the halfpence to the pence
> And prayer to shivering prayer, until
> You have dried the marrow from the bone;
> For men were born to pray and save:
> Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
> It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet there is already evidence that Yeats may be willing to allow to Ireland the same forgiving tolerance he had extended to Maud. In the first bitterness of disappointment that followed the evaporation of an ideal he always tended to strike out in a blind fury of frustration, but in time he almost always came to see that he had expected too much; that he had become so engrossed in his high dreams that he had mistaken them for realities. With this realization would come toleration, an acceptance of reality with all its imperfections. The beginning of such an attitude toward the Irish may be seen in the poem 'Paudeen';(3)

> Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite
> Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind
> Among the stones and thorn trees, under morning light;
> Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind
> A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought
> That on the lonely height where all are in God's eye,
> There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,
> A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry.

The practice of using as subjects for his poetry events of only passing interest, a manifestation of his more realistic phase, reaches its peak in this volume. In addition to the attacks on the Irish we have the taut lyric, gemlike not more in its beauty than in its hardness, 'To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing',(4) with its final

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1) Later Poems, P. 195.
2) Hone, P. 285.
3) Later Poems, P. 198.
4) Later Poems, P. 197.

lines perhaps as perfect as anything Yeats ever wrote in his new style

> ...turn away
> And like a laughing string
> Whereon mad fingers play
> Amid a place of stone,
> Be secret and exult,
> Because of all things known
> That is most difficult.

Again, there are the two poems to Iseult Gonne, Maud's daughter: 'To a Child Dancing In The Wind',(1) with its light opening lines that deepen to bitterness; and 'Two Years Later', (2) wherein he gazes on her gay, wild youth, and, seeing in her the budding of a beauty as great as that of her mother, is made angry and sad at the thought of what her future must be.

> O you will take whatever's offered
> And dream that all the world's a friend,
> Suffer as your mother suffered,
> And be as broken in the end.(3)

Maud herself, significantly, has ceased to be a dominant influence on his poetry. Though she is sometimes mentioned incidentally, only two pieces are directly concerned with her, (4) and in both of these she is spoken of as a past glory.

> Although crowds gathered once if she but showed her face,
> And even old men's eyes grew dim, this hand alone,
> Like some last courtier at a gypsy camping place
> Babbling of fallen majesty, records what's gone.(5)

Though she will never cease to be one of the subjects of his verses, never again is she to be the main burden of them. Her beauty gone, she has become only a memory, still painful, but with the sharp edges being steadily worn away by time. As with much belonging to the past, which the poet now has the vision to see and the courage to recognize as such, she is gently

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1) Later Poems, P.197.
1) ibid., P. 222.
2) ibid., P. 223.
3) ibid.
4) 'That the Night Come',P.229; and Fallen Majesty', P. 225.
5) ibid., P. 225.

relegated to the realm of memories. Another example of this process is seen in the long narrative poem, 'The Two Kings', (1) a straightforward retelling in verse of the legend of Eochaid and Edain. The poem is a failure because the old myths, while admirably fitted to his twilight style, are quite unsuited to the clarity and precision of his new verse forms. Essentially elusive and unreal themselves, the legends lose their appeal when translated into plain, even harsh language.

Although Yeats never altogether ignored the mystic side of his nature, it is least evident in this volume, where the realistic approach to life is used most frequently. 'The Mountain Tomb' (2) reveals that he was probably dabbling in Rosicrucianism at this time, but beyond this poem there is little that springs from his occult interests.

He does seem, however, to have been called upon to defend his way of life against that of men who seek material gain only. In 'The Witch'(3) and 'The Peacock'(4) especially this is apparent;

> What's riches to him
> That has made a great Peacock
> With the pride of his eye?

In fact, he seems to be in a self-explanatory frame of mind throughout, presenting two not irreconciliable reasons for having changed his style. In 'The Realists' he says that with the world of his dreams destroyed it would have been foolish to have gone on writing of that world, while in 'The Coat' (5) he claims that he had made a new style because fools had taken his old one and pretended that it was their own;

> Song, let them take it
> There's more enterprise
> In walking naked.

The most significant poems in this volume, however, are those in which

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1) Later Poems, P. 182.
2) ibid., P. 221
3) ibid., P. 219.
4) ibid., P. 220.
5) ibid., P. 233

for the first time we see the characteristically meditative spirit ~~come in~~ of his later work. In 'The Cold Heaven' (1), "he suddenly achieves that fury of self-control, later proclaimed as a deliberate end, which aligns him with the turbulent Donne".(2) Much the same might be said of 'The Three Hermits', (3) which, though more restrained in tone, gives a still clearer picture of what is to follow. While one of the old men tries to stay awake to pray and another cracks his fleas and philosophizes on the after-life, the third,

> Giddy with his hundredth year
> Sang unnoticed like a bird.(4)

He possesses a joyous knowledge that lifts him above the others and makes him indifferent to their activities, while they, immersed in their trivialities, are blind to the revelation he has achieved.

It is not until 'The Magi', (5) however, that we encounter that dark and disturbing undercurrent that runs through so much of his meditative verse, reaching its clearest expression in 'The Second Coming' (6). The piece conveys a sense of the imminent birth of a strange and dreadful creature, the "rough beast" that in 'The Second Coming' "slouches toward Bethlehem to be born". The Magi stand expectantly waiting

> ...hoping to find once more,
> Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
> The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor (7)

Both poems have their origin in Yeats' theory that the cycle of civilization inaugurated by Christ's birth is coming to a close, and that another cycle, heralded by another momentous conception and birth, is about to commence.(8) Nevertheless, there is something in the poem deeper and more sinister than this; it seems to have emerged from the depths of a soul, which, having had its own foundations swept away, wishes to strike at the very roots of ours.

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1) Later Poems, P. 228.
2) Hone, P. 317.
3) Later Poems, P. 206-7.
4) ibid., P. 207
5) ibid., P. 231
6) ibid. P. 346.(In The Wild Swans at Coole).
7) ibid., P.231
8(Henn,Ch.11.

The other of the "two remarkable 'philosophical' poems", which, as Macneice has noted, "foreshadow much that is to come"(1) is 'The Dolls'. (2) Here the dolls set up a cry against the human child that the dollmaker has brought into the house. As one critic has explained it,

> The dolls, who represent intellectual Being in opposition to physical or physiological Becoming, make an indignant uproar because the doll-maker's wife has had a baby. She, Vacillating---like Yeats himself---between the values of life and thought, apologizes to her husband that it was an accident. (3)

The volume ends with an untitled, italicized epilogue(4) in which Yeats indicates that henceforth his way shall lead him more and more into introspective meditative poetry. His inspiration comes "...not now as once/A clear articulation in the air/ But inwardly..." He has found a friendly retreat at Kyle-na-no (Lady Gregory's Estate), and shall from now on seek companionship among his own kind, "Beyond the dull fling of the dull ass's hoof". He will write only to please himself now; it no longer matters what others think, nor, even, that they have made of all his precious things "but a poet the passing dogs defile". He has left the way of the market carts to follow his true destiny, soaring with the birds above all common things.

Of all the volumes of Yeats' poetry, this is the most significant. Here all traces of his early style have vanished, and only vestiges of the subject matter of his first period and the early years of his transition remain. As Macneice writes;

> He had widened his range...He was now dealing fairly directly with contemporary experience, some of it historical, some of it casual and personal. As well as admitting contemporary matter into his poetry, he was also admitting moral or philosophical problems. And he was expressing many more moods, not only the 'poetic' ones. He is writing at one moment as a cynic, at another as a speculative thinker. (5)

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1) MacNeice, Louis, The Poetry of Yeats, W.B., Oxford, 1941, P.116.
2) Later Poems, P. 232
3) MacNeice, P. 116.
4) Later Poems, P. 234.
5) MacNeice, P. 178.

The tendency toward bare realism that emerged toward the end of the first decade of the century reaches its peak and begins to give way to the philosophical poetry the perfection of which is to mark the end of Yeats development. He has become adept in the use of his new metrical devices and from now on his style is to show no significant change, only a greater flexibility and power as he becomes, with time and practice, even more profficient in its use.

Most of the material which is to form the basic subject matter of his future poetry may also be found in Responsibilities; ancestor-worship, the idealization of the past, a frequently shocking sensuality, humour that is always to a certain degree satirical, meditations on the conflict between reality and the world of the spirit, and themes drawn from his private theories concerning history and religion.

After this volume his poetry is concerned not so much with innovation as with elaboration and clarification; he does not often introduce new themes, but enlarges on those already present in his work. Though it is to be fourteen years before he achieves a sustained level of perfection in it, he is emerging into his final period.

CHAPTER 11

BEYOND 1914

A. 1915

In the three years that followed the publication of Responsibilities most of the loose ends still evident at the time of its appearance were gathered up.

The poems of 1915, (1) for example, have about them an air of calm and of reasoning acceptance that is in striking contrast to the impassioned bitterness that scars so many of the pieces of the previous year. As Dr. Jeffares points out; "The passionate feelings of 1913 and 1914 over, Yeats turned to writing lyrics in 1915 which possess a great dignity and a largeness of view".(2)

One reason for this sudden, though short-lived mellowing is the fact that Yeats celebrated his fiftieth birthday this year, and seemed to feel that the fiery passions of youth were something best abandoned;

> ...O Heart, we are old
> The living beauty is for younger men,
> We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears. (3)

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1) Jeffares, P.P. 183-5. 2) Ibid., P. 183. 3) Later Poems, P.251, 'The living Beauty'.

He sees, with a return of his almost prophetic foresight, that from this time forward he must draw contentment

> From beauty that is cast out of a mould
> In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears,(1)

The things that in the past excited in him violent emotions, love or hatred, have sunken to passionless memories. He praises Maud in "His Phoenix",(2) 'Her Praise', (3) and 'Presences',(4) but there is in none of these poems reproach or adulation; only an understanding sympathy for one who had once meant more than life to him.

His disgust with the city Irish, however, has not yet altogether subsided, and in 'The People' (5) he regrets the time and effort that he has wasted on the people of "this unmannerly town /Where who has served the most is most defamed".(6) Here again, as in the anti-Irish pieces of Responsibilities, he regrets that he has not spent his time in Italy (which he had visited with Lady Gregory in 1907),(7) where, he feels his work might have been appreciated;

> ...I might have lived,
> And you know well how great the longing had been,
> Where every day my footfall should have lit
> In the green shadow of Ferrara wall. (8)

Meanwhile, certain fresh tendencies observed in his previous volume of verse are expanded; his ancestor-worship reappearing in the poem 'In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen', (9) and his satiric vein enlivening 'The Scholars'; (10)

> Lord, what would they say
> Should their Catullus walk that way?

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1) Later Poems, P. 251.
2) ibid., P. 277.
3) ibid., P. 273.
4) ibid., P. 284.
5) ibid., P. 275.
6) ibid.
7) Jeffares, P. 156.
8) Later Poems, P. 275.
9) ibid., P. 288.
10) ibid., P. 255.

B. 1916-17.

It was the first months of 1916 that were of the greatest importance in this period of final adjustment, for it was then that Yeats first brought to their ultimate refinement his dramatic theories and had his unfavorable opinion of Irish manhood reversed.

In March (1) of this year the first of the 'Plays for Dancers', At the Hawk's Well, was performed

> ...in an ordinary room without a platform, the stage a bare space in front of a wall against which was placed a patterned screen. Three musicians played certain instruments---drum, gong and zither, and also marked the beginning and end of the play by the ceremony of the folding of the cloth....the speaking characters---the Old and the Young Man; the musician and the dancer, the Guardian of the Well, had their faces painted to resemble masks....The central situation of this play, as in all the plays (Those for dancers) was the dance...it was the wish of Yeats that the dancing in all his plays should be formal, ressembling that of marionettes, and not human and personal.(2)

As we have seen, Yeats had been steadily moving toward a form of drama (3) from which everything non-essential, which to him was everything but the words and someone to say them, was excluded. By 1910 he had proceeded as far along this road as he could go unaided. Then Ezra Pound introduced him to the Japanese Noh plays; (4) "spectables where speech, music, song, and dance created an image of nobility and strange beauty".(5) In an essay, 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan', written the month after the production of At the Hawk's Well, he writes that with the aid of these oriental plays; "I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect, and symbolic, and having no need of mob or press to pay its way---an aristocratic form".(6) It was a form suited for presentation to a select audience of about forty persons in a small room rather than on the stage of a large theatre.

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1) Jeffares, P. 165.
2) Thouless Patricia, Modern Poetic Drama, Basil Blackwall, Oxford, 1934. P.11-12.
3) Essays, P.274. Thesis, Section III, Ch.11, 8.
4) ibid. P.283.
5) ibid., P. 274.

> There will be no scenery, for three musicians...can describe place and weather, and at moments action, and accompany it all by drum and gong or flute and dulcimer. Instead of the players working themselves into a violence of passion indecorous in our sitting-room, the music, the beauty of form and voice all come to climax in pantomimic dance.(1)

Though getting closer to his audience in a physical sense by eliminating the ordinary stage, he seeks to maintain a distance from it by other means, one of which is to have his players wear masks; (2)

> All imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance once chosen must be firmly held....Verse, ritual, music, and dance in association with action require that gesture, costume, facial expression, stage arrangement must help in keeping the door....the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enables us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. As a deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human, most delicate, we should distrust bodily distance, mechanism, and loud noise.(3)

Thus the distance that he seeks to put between himself and his audience is not physical, but mental and emotional. Here, in a form adapted, in keeping with his contempt for the mob, to a select, aristocratic audience which can appreciate so restricted---Yeats would have said 'pure'---art form we have the final perfection of the dramatic theory that he had been expounding for two decades.

At the Hawk's Well was produced in March. In April the Easter Rebellion took place giving Yeats "a shock at once enlivening and horrifying. He had built an Ireland out of words and now he saw them translated into action".(4) More than this, he had turned away in disappointment and bitter disgust upon discovering, so he thought, that the romantic Ireland he had created in his mind did not exist. Now he saw the men on whom he had heaped his scorn, the clerks and shopkeepers, suddenly performing deeds fully as courageous as any done by the gods of his heroic ideal. Moreover, he himself could not participate in these actions, but could only stand and watch.

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1) Essays, P. 273. 2) ibid. 3) ibid., P.P. 277-8. 4) MacNeice, P.118.

Though it was Yeats' recurring tragedy that whenever he thought that he had found firm ground for his convictions that ground fell away from under him, it was his recurring triumph to be able to take stock of the altered situation and conduct himself accordingly. It was this adaptibility that enabled him to emerge from every disappointment and error of judgement a better poet. Seldom is it more clearly visible than here. He saw at once that he had been overhasty in his condemnation of the Irish and at once admitted his error in the magnificient poetry that he composed in honor of those whom he had previously vilified. In September he published the poem 'Easter, 1916', (1) the title of which, as Jeffares points out, (2) deliberately recalls the earlier attack in 'September 1913'.(3) He relates how, meeting these men on their way home from counter and desk, he had muttered "polite meaningless words" and passed by;

> And thought before I had done
> Of a mocking tale or a jibe
> To please a companion
> Around the fire at the club,
> Being certain that they and I
> But lived where motley is worn (4)

So it was before Easter Week, but now,

> All changed, changed utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born.

This same year Yeats wrote to his father that his thought had now become:

> ...part of a religious system more or less logically worked out. A system which will, I hope, interest you as a form of poetry. I find the setting of it all in order has helped my verse, has given me a new framework and new patterns.(5)

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1) Wade, Blibliography, P. 122.
2) Jeffares, P. 187.
3) Later Poems, P. 195.
4) ibid., P. 334.
5) Hone, P. 325.

Where in his earlier verse Yeats had made use of the myths and beliefs ready to hand in Ireland, for his later meditative poetry he created a private theological system of incredible complexity. So complex was it in fact, that he himself could never define with any certainty more than its broadest outlines. He saw the need for an universally accepted system of belief to which the poet could fit his work. The present age seemed to him to have largely abandoned the Christian framework on which the greatest poetry of the past had been based, while he would have nothing to do with the naturalistic, scientific system which seemed to his eye to have been substituted for it. A new theological system was needed to serve as a basis for poetry, and so he set about the tremendous task of supplying one.

Though the various theories which form the root of his system, such as those of the cycles of history and the self and anti-self, had been taking form in his mind for some time, it was not until after his marriage that these scattered concepts began to form a coherent body of philosophy, so that the vast majority of the poetry based on the theology found in A Vision lies outside the bounds of this thesis. We have already seen, however, in the meditative verse in Responsibilities, definite references to this system. In 'Ego Dominus Tuus', and the essay 'Anima Mundi' further evidence of its gradual correlation is found. That Yeats ever thought his system might be universally accepted is doubtful; it was formulated as a background on which to base his poetry, and, perhaps, as an attempt to fill the need his fiercely independent yet incurably mystic personality felt for a definite religious philosophy.

In the poem 'Ego Dominus Tuus', dated December 1915 (1) but appearing first as in introduction to the Essay 'Anima Hominis' in February of 1917, (2) we can see the clarification of his theory regarding the self and anti-self. The first example of his truly great meditative poetry, the piece takes the form of a dispute between two parts of Yeats; 'Hic', representing the anti-self who "defends the objective", (3) and 'Ille', representing the self, who "defends the subjective".(4) To begin with 'Hic'accuses the poet of continuing to walk in the light of the moon (The imagination), still "Enthralled by the unconquerable delusion"(5) though the best part of his life is past. 'Ille' replies that "By the help of an image I call to my own opposite"(6) 'Hic', however, would find himself and not an image. That, replies 'Ille', is "Our modern hope" which has made us no more than critics, men who "but half create/Timid, entangled, empty, and abashed". (7) Dante, he believes, fashioned from his opposite "that spectral image" (8) that is our conception of him.

When 'Hic' suggests that surely there have been artists who were happy men, 'Ille' (Yeats) denies it, for;

> ....art is but a vision of reality.
> What portion in the world can the artist have,
> Who has awakened from the common dream,
> But dissipation and despair? (9)

Finally, when reminded that,

> A style is found by sedentary toil,
> And by the imitation of great masters...(10)

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1) Essays, P. 484.
2) ibid., P. 485.
3) Jeffares, P. 193.
4) ibid.
5) Essays, P. 480.
6) ibid.,
7) ibid.,
8) ibid
9) ibid., P. 483.
10) ibid.

'Ille' replies;

> ...I seek an image, not a book;
> These men that in their writings are most wise
> Own nothing but their own blind, stupefied hearts. (1)

He will go on seeking till he finds the mysterious one that shall

> ...look most like me, being indeed my double,
> And prove of all imaginable things
> The most unlike, being my anti-self,
> And, standing by these characters, disclose
> All that I seek; (2)

Here we see the return in full force of the mysticism all but abandoned during the period of transition. Now, however, it has been transformed from the 'dreaming wisdom' of the earlier poetry into the intense, soul-searching quest for the ultimate truths that are the foundation of the great meditation poetry to come.

A further picture of Yeats' convictions and thought at this time, elaborating the ideas seen in the poem, is found in the essay that it introduces, 'Anima Hominis'. (3) In it Yeats writes that no poet he has ever read of has been a sentimentalist, for;

> the other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self, as one may choose to name it, comes but to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality. The sentimentalists are practical men...whose understanding of happiness is to be so busy whether at work or at play, that all is forgotten but the momentary aim...for the revelation of reality, tradition offers us a different word---ecstasy ...We must not make a false faith by hiding from our thoughts the causes of doubt, for faith is the highest achievement of the human intellect, the only gift man can make to God, and therefore it must be offered in sincerity. Neither must we create, by hiding ugliness, a false beauty as our offering to the world. He only can create the greatest imaginable beauty who has endured all imaginable pangs, for only when we have seen and foreseen what we dread shall we be rewarded.(4)

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1) ~~ibid.,~~ Essays, P. 484.
2) ibid.
3) Essays, PP. 484-506.
4) ibid., P.P. 493-4.
5) ibid., P. 506

Here we see Yeats' thought matured, taking substantially, the form it is to hold for the remainder of his life. He knows now that in the creation of true beauty ugliness cannot be ignored nor pain eliminated; that the truly great artist takes for his materials all experience, making beauty grow even out of agony and unshapeliness. Nor has he lost any of his prophetic ability.

> A poet, when he is growing old, will ask himself if he cannot keep his mask and his vision without new bitterness, new disappointment...Surely, he may think, now that I have found vision and mask I need not suffer any longer....Then he will remember Wordsworth withering into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted, and climb to some waste room and find, forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust. (1)

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1) ~~Ibid.,~~ Essays, P. 506.

This essay was published in February of 1917. From its contents we can see that Yeats had reached maturity not only in the style, form, and content of his verse, but in his thought as well. With regard to his personal life, however, one problem remained yet unresolved. His growing pride of family had brought to him a desire for children to carry on his line. In addition, his father had been urging him to settle down, while he himself had met several eligible young ladies, one of whom, a Miss Hyde-Lees, had attracted him. On the other hand, Maud's husband, John MacBride, had been executed by the English for his part in the Easter Week Rebellion. (1) Yeats visited her in Normandy and once again asked her to marry him. She refused. Then, led perhaps by some residue of his old passion roused by the familiar beauty of her daughter, he proposed to the fifteen-year-old girl. Her rejection (2) severed finally all strings that bound him to that last unhappy part of his past. On October 21 he married Miss Hyde-Lees, "a girl strikingly beautiful in a barbaric manner". (3) By this act, with which he finally closed the door on the last part of his bitter youth, Yeats may be said to have reached maturity as a person as well as a poet.

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1) ~~ibid.,~~ Jeffares, P. 189.
2) ibid., P. 190.
3) ibid.

CONCLUSION

From this detailed examination of his life and work up to the time of his marriage in 1917 it may be seen that Yeats' emergence as a great poet was the result of a steady, if somewhat leisurely progress.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century he composed poetry full of the gentle, misty beauty and dreaming wisdom found in most of the verse of that period. It is these lyrics that have remained, and probably will remain, the most popular among the common people. The twilight style of the 1890's, while attractive, was, however, a restricted one, and in writing The Wind Among the Reeds Yeats exhausted its limited possibilities. With the turn of the century this dreamy romanticism went out of fashion, and the other 'nineties poets, finding the artificial atmosphere in which they had lived and written vanished, were unable to change themselves to meet the new conditions and either perished or sank into mediocrity.

Yeats' disillusionment and despair was quite as deep as theirs. He possessed, however, greater adaptability and a wider field of interests than they did. Realizing that he had gone as far as he could in one direction, under the one pose or 'mask', he saw that he must explore new paths. He saw also that this process, even if successful, would be a long and difficult one; that during this period of transition he would require both a refuge and some form of discipline. The theatre, struggling for new life, provided him with both. Sufficiently exacting to keep his thoughts from his own sorrows, stage work was at the same time precise and prosaic enough to bring his fancy down from the clouds and harness it to reality. On the other hand, the necessity of writing as well as producing new plays for the theatrical revival allowed adequate space in which his imagination might exercise itself.

Under Yeats' direction, the Irish National Theatre became a focal point of the 'new drama'. Meanwhile, in the midst of his work at the Abbey the poet began, slowly and hesitantly, to fashion a new style for his poetry. Then, when this style was formed and the need for self-discipline at an end, tragedy and disappointment, which, together with his rare personal insight, had driven him into the theatre combined, in the vilification and death of Synge, to drive him out of it. Rejected first by the woman, then by the people, to whom he had offered his life and work, he turned, in Responsibilities, to writing not for a woman's sake, nor for that of the Irish people, but to satisfy himself. In so doing he came to maturity.

It was at once a narrowing and a broadening process. As he sank into himself and drew his inspiration less from externals than from his own thought, his field of vision widened and he became a greater poet. In his youth he had communicated his wisdom as he had glimpsed it; dimly, through transfiguring, delusive mists. Now, having come, through age and experience, to see more clearly, he translated his discoveries into precise, lucid language and imagery. Emerging from the shell of his fancy, he was shocked and shaken by his first sight of reality with all its external ugliness and brutality, with the result that the first products of his transition were harsh and bitter. Soon, however, he began to look beneath the surface; to seek, and to find, the greater beauty behind the mask of sordidness and decay. In many of the poems in Responsibilities, and in most of those written in the three years following its publication, we discover him accepting the imperfections inherent in reality and delving below and beyond this unprepossess-

ing exterior in a constant search for beauty and truth.

Yeats was to continue this search, sometimes in hope, often in despair, occasionally in mocking bitterness, but always in poetry, always probing further and deeper, till the end of his life. And he did not seek in vain. To Elizabeth Pelham Yeats wrote on the fourth of January, 1939, twenty-four days before his death (1) that he was;

> ...happy, and I think full of an energy, of an energy I had despaired of. It seems to me that, I have found what I wanted. When I try to put all into a phrase I say, "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it".(2)

The End

1) Jeffares, P. 297.
2) Hone, P. 510.

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